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DING VS GUKESH

THE FIGHT FOR THE CHESS CROWN

WHAT DOES THE MATCH IN SINGAPORE MEAN FOR THE FUTURE OF CHESS?

FROM PARIS TO NEW YORK: THE SURREALISTS' LOVE AFFAIR WITH CHESS

IMPRESSUM

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The pivot to Asia:
What Gukesh and Ding's battle means for chess

The match in Singapore is not just about who will become world champion, but also about the future of chess.

The upcoming World Championship match, set to commence at the end of the month in Singapore, has some in the chess world already considering the outcome a foregone conclusion. The Challenger, 18-year-old Gukesh Dommaraju, has demonstrated superior form and consistency, standing in stark contrast to the uneven and fragile performance of the reigning World Champion, Ding Liren.

The betting markets echo this sentiment. As of early November, the odds heavily favour Gukesh. For instance, Bwin lists him at 1/2 odds, implying a 66.7% chance of victory, compared to Ding's 29/20, which suggests a 40.8% chance. Similarly, Bet365 places Gukesh at 2/5 and Ding at 7/4. Given some experience I have in polling (I head content strategy at the polling company, YouGov and have closely followed or been involved in election polling in the past 10 years) public perception may not often align with the outcome, especially if many people think one side has already won.

In this issue of *BCM*, GM Alex Colovic provides an excellent analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of both contenders. Yet, as Ding wisely observed, Gukesh may have momentum, but a match setting is different from tournament play—where the Chinese champion has the advantage of recent experience from last year's world championship.

Beyond the match itself, an intriguing broader question arises: What are the implications of chess increasingly pivoting towards Asia? Regardless of who wins, the world crown will remain in the East, mirroring the longstanding dominance of Asian players in the women's game. This shift raises significant questions about the future of chess sponsorship and audiences. Will interest in the West wane? Will a continued focus on Asia make it more challenging for FIDE to attract Western sponsors and host marquee events in the West?

Since the fall of the Soviet Union, Western Europe and America have taken on a lot of the post-Soviet talent, leading to more chess in the West. FIDE has been proactive in forging Western partnerships — just this year they secured Google as the presenter of the Singapore match, hosted a World Corporate Championship on Wall Street featuring the likes of BlackRock and Goldman Sachs, and are holding the World Rapid and Blitz in New York this Christmas. But as Asia takes centre stage, particularly India, will it lead not only in playing talent but also in sponsorship and organisational influence? And if so, how will this change the face of chess and how will FIDE balance it? One example is the Global Chess League - sponsored by billionaire Anand Mahindra and his company - which is looking towards the Indian Cricket League for inspiration.

For a perspective from the West, this issue features an interview with Steve Doyle, a high-profile executive from New Jersey who has been involved in chess for over 50 years. His insights reveal how chess is perceived in the U.S. and what we might expect from this part of the world, moving forward.

Finally, it's important to acknowledge that good people are out there at the heart of any meaningful pursuit—be it in chess, life, or relationships. Or, as BCM Director Stephen Lowe aptly says: "Givers." This issue marks the retirement of one such person, Pete Tamburro, whose Opening for Amateurs column has graced the magazine for a decade. Pete's professionalism, love for chess, vast knowledge, and easy-going nature make him one of those special people who elevate both chess and life. BCM and I, as editor, thank Pete for his invaluable work and support and wish him all the best in his future endeavours.

TRIUMPH AND TRAGEDY IN SINGAPORE: THE FIGHT FOR THE CHESS CROWN

THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS AN EASY WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP MATCH, AND THIS ONE WON'T BE EITHER

By GM Aleksandar Colovic; www.alexcolovic.com

Photo: FIDE Official / Michal Walusza, Stev Bonhage, David Llada

The upcoming match for the World Championship title is already a peculiar one. Scheduled in Singapore, from 25 November to 13 December (the first and last playing days), it features a clash between two players who could not be in more contrasting states.

There haven't been many World Championship matches where the reigning World Champion was given so little hope of retaining his title. In this respect, only two relatively recent matches come to mind: the match in Elista in 2006, when the ailing and "weak" Vladimir Kramnik faced the rampant and all-conquering Veselin Topalov; and the match in Chennai in 2013, when the whole world anticipated the "inevitable" crowning of Magnus Carlsen over the past-his-prime champion Viswanathan Anand.

We already know the results of these matches: Kramnik raised his level compared to his previous appearances and beat Topalov, while Anand couldn't do the same and was beaten by Carlsen. What will happen in Singapore? Which path of his predecessors will Ding Liren follow - Kramnik's or Anand's?

I remember reading about Fischer's preparations for his match with Spassky and what he said afterward. While preparing for their match, he reviewed all of Spassky's games and confidently claimed that Spassky's level had dropped in the couple of years prior. This gave him confidence going into the match, and now we know he was right. What he said after the match was also insightful - Spassky played as he expected him to, at the same level as in the tournaments leading up to the match.

This resonates with what Magnus Carlsen has said about how players perform in World Championship matches. He noted that they play as they have played in the period leading up to the match. Similar to Fischer, he meant the level over a prolonged period before the match, not based on one bad result.

These observations from his predecessors do not bode well for Ding Liren.

THE CHAMPION

It was only in a relatively recent interview that it became fully known what happened to Ding Liren before, during, and after the match in Astana. Just before that match, Ding suffered heartbreak due to the end of a long-term relationship with his girlfriend. A gentle soul, he suffered greatly in the aftermath, which coincided with the match in Astana.

Sometimes, it's possible to play well when suffering emotionally. The player detaches himself from the game at hand, as the emotional turmoil becomes all-encompassing, only to find that playing in this disinterested state of mind enables him to play quite decently.

The match in Astana was full of ups and downs, probably mirroring Ding's mental state, but, in view of the above, I now see his epic 46...♖g6 in a different light - a move played by someone who is brave because he doesn't care as much.

After winning the title, Ding stepped out of the public eye, visited clinics and various doctors, and tried to get his physical and mental health in order. Alas, as we have seen so far, he hasn't been very successful.

This has been reflected in his results, which have been underwhelming, to put it mildly. These poor results stem from several factors. The most important one is his lack of mental stamina - the ability to withstand the tension throughout an entire game. This problem has been particularly painful for Ding, as his opponents have come with a simple game plan when facing him: play any complex position, keep the tension, and wait for Ding to collapse. Unfortunately for Ding, this strategy has worked all too well. Here is a typical example of that strategy working to perfection:

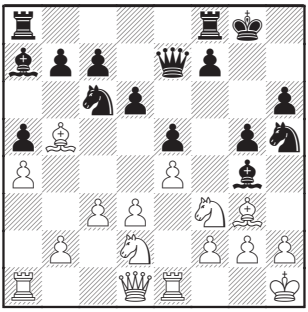
Alireza **Firouzja – Ding** Liren

11th Sinquefield Cup Saint Louis USA (7.4)

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗c4 ♘f6 4.d3 ♗c5 5.c3 d6 6.a4 a5 7.♗g5 h6 8.♗h4 ♕e7 A small subtlety. Black could have played 8...g5 immediately, but he waits for White to commit with his king's position.

9.0-0 In case of 9.♘bd2 Black can still wait with 9...♗a7.

9...g5 10.♗g3 ♗g4 11.♘bd2 ♗a7 12.♗b5 0-0 13.♖e1 ♘h5 14.♔h1



The engine disapproves of this move.

14.h3 is natural, but likely Firouzja was worried about 14...♗xh3?! with the idea of ...♘xg3. The complications after *(14...♗e6 is better, after 15.♘f1 f5 16.exf5 ♖xf5 17.♘e3 ♘xg3 18.fxg3 the position is quite unclear with mutual chances.)* 15.♘xe5! are in White's favour, but they are hard to calculate: 15...♘xg3 16.♘xc6 bxc6 17.♗xc6 ♖ab8 *(17...♗e6? 18.♗xa8 ♖xa8 19.♕f3 traps the knight on g3.)* 18.gxh3 ♕e6 19.♕g4 the most human move. *(19.♔g2? ♗xf2! 20.♔xf2 ♕xh3 21.♕f3 ♖xb2 22.♖ad1 f5! is a mess, where Black has enough compensation for the piece; 19.♖b1! cooly defending the pawn on b2 is what the engine prefers. It looks scary after 19...♕xh3 but White has 20.♕f3 and keeps things under control after a subsequent d4.)* 19...♖xb2 20.♕xg3 ♖xd2 21.d4 and White is better thanks to the bishop on a7 being out of play.

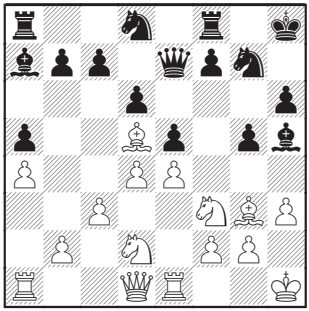
14...♘g7 Possible, but somewhat timid. Choosing timid continuations when more dynamic and aggressive ones are available has become characteristic of Ding's post-championship play.

14...♕f6 was more circumspect. After 15.h3 ♗e6 16.♖f1 ♘e7 Black builds up his kingside play;

14...f5 was another attempt. 15.exf5 ♕g7 16.♕b3+ ♔h8 17.d4 exd4 18.♗d3 ♘xg3+ 19.fxg3 ♖ab8 is a very sharp position with chances for both sides.

15.h3 ♗h5 16.♗c4 ♔h8 17.♗d5 ♘d8 17...♕d7 with the idea of ...f5 was more dynamic.

18.d4



18...f6 Ding plays solidly. Nothing wrong with it, as the position is fine for Black.

19.♘f1 White could have waited for Black to play ...c6 first before rerouting the knight, as with the c6-square still available for the knight, Black had an interesting change of course at his disposal.

19...c6 Ding continues with his plan.

19...exd4!? 20.cxd4 ♘c6 was a curious way to take advantage of the availability of the c6-square and attack White's centre. Now the pawn on d4 is under attack thanks to the pin on the knight on f3, so White is on the defensive. 21.♗xc6 bxc6 22.♘1h2 ♕d7 with ...f5 next and Black has the initiative.

20.♗a2 ♘de6 21.♘e3 ♖ad8 A natural move, Black brings the last reserves into the game.

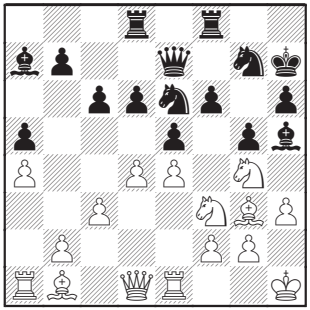
21...♖ae8 was an alternative. 22.♘f5 ♘xf5! *(22...♕d7? is bad in view of 23.dxe5 and the queen is not defended on d7, so Black loses material.)* 23.exf5 ♘g7 24.♗h2 ♗xf3 25.♕xf3 e4! this is only possible because the rook on e8 supports it. 26.♕d1 ♘xf5 and Black wins a pawn, though after 27.f3 White has certain compensation.

22.♘g4 22.♘f5!? was possible now. After 22...♕d7 *(22...♘xf5 23.exf5 ♘g7 24.♗h2! with g4 next Black's knight on g7 won't be a happy piece. Here 24...♗xf3 25.♕xf3 doesn't help as Black cannot follow up with ...e4 as in the line after 21...♖ae8.)* 23.♗xe6 *(23.♘xh6 exd4 24.♘g4 dxc3 25.bxc3* is very complicated and unclear after *25...d5 26.exd5 cxd5)* 23...♕xe6 24.♘xg7 ♔xg7 25.♘xg5 temporarily this wins a pawn, but after 25...hxg5 26.♕xh5 exd4 Black regains it, with an unclear position.

22...♔h7 23.♗b1? Not only does this look odd, shutting the rook on a1, but here even the appearances don't lie. White didn't have too many constructive moves at his disposal, though.

23.♗h2 doesn't do much, but it also doesn't spoil anything;

23.♘e3 it was possible to go back, again not spoiling anything.



23...♗g6? Ding misses his chance.

23...♗xg4! 24.hxg4 ♖h8! was a great way to start an attack on the h-file. White is in trouble here after 25.♔g1 h5 26.gxh5 ♔g8 27.♗a2 ♘xh5 28.♗h2 ♔f8 intending ...♘f4 and being able to recapture with a knight. 29.♗xe6 ♕xe6 30.♕d3 ♖d7 with a strong initiative on the kingside.

24.♕d2 The game resumes its maneuvering nature now.

24...♘f4? A tactical mistake that went unnoticed because it was very difficult to precisely evaluate the complications after the capture of the knight. Black should have continued with maneuvers with moves like 24...♕f7 or 24...♖fe8.

25.♗c2? Missing a chance, but it's pardonable in view of the complexity of the correct move.

25.♗xf4! was strong. Now whichever way Black recaptures White plays ♘h4! 25...exf4 *(25...gxf4 26.♘h4 ♗f7 27.♗c2 with further ♘h2, ♖g2 and opening of the g-file with g3 gives White excellent chances. However, this is not so easy to grasp from afar.)* 26.♘h4! ⩲ a piece sacrifice that works, but this is just the beginning of a forcing line: 26...gxh4 27.♕xf4 ♔h8 28.♕xh6+ ♗h7 29.e5 f5 30.♘f6 ♖xf6 31.♕xf6 ♖e8 32.♕h6! and White has a solid advantage, but the position remains complex.

25...♕e6 Both players ignore the idea of ♗xf4 followed by ♘h4.

25...♘ge6 26.♖ad1 ♕f7 remains tense.

26.♖ad1 26.♗xf4 exf4 27.♘h4! works again, though in a somewhat better version for Black after the difficult to see 27...gxh4 28.♕xf4 h5! 29.♕h6+ ♔g8 30.e5! an amazing move, but the only one if White is not to become worse. 30...♗xc2 31.exf6 ♕f7 32.fxg7 ♕xg7

33.♕xh5 ♕g6 34.♘h6+ ♔h8 35.♘f7+ ♔g7 36.♕xg6+ ♔xg6 37.♘xd8 ♖xd8 38.♖e7 ♖b8 when the passive bishop on a7 gives White good winning chances in the endgame.

26...h5 27.♘gh2 The alternative was to put the knight on e3, but perhaps Firouzja was worried about a possible sacrifice on h3.

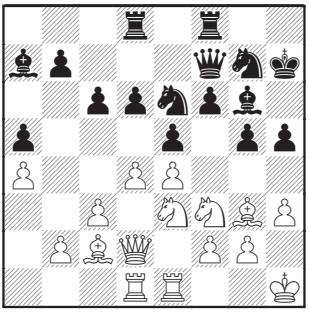
27.♘e3 objectively this was better, but White had to see that after 27...♘xh3 28.♘f5! is good for him after 28...♘f4 29.dxe5 dxe5 30.♕xd8! ♖xd8 31.♖xd8 which according to the engine is winning for White.

27...♕f7 28.♘f1 Without the threat of ...♘xh3 White sends the knight to e3.

28...♘fe6 Ding keeps the knight on g7 in order to have better control of the f5-square, but it was possible to keep the knight on f4 instead.

28...♘ge6 29.♘e3 h4 30.♗h2 ♗h5 surrenders control of the f5-square, but Black's active pieces compensate for it.

29.♘e3



29...exd4? Here comes the characteristic moment. After a tense game that involved a lot of calculation and strategical considerations, Ding collapses. The opening of the position is fatal for Black as he simply loses the pawn on a5. Ding must have miscalculated something here.

Ding Liren and Alireza Firouzja
Photo: Stev Bonhage

29...♔h8 kept the position complex.

30.cxd4 The pawn on a5 hangs.

30...d5 30...♗b6 31.d5 and Black is positionally busted.

31.exd5 cxd5 32.♗xg6+ ♕xg6 33.♕xa5 Black lost a pawn for nothing. The rest is relatively simple.

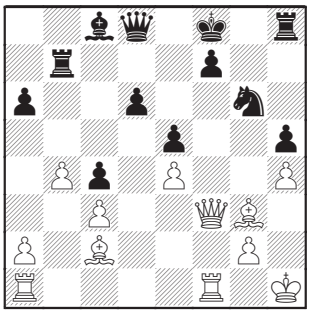
33...♗b8 34.♗xb8 ♖xb8 35.♕xd5 ♘f4 36.♕b5 g4 37.hxg4 hxg4 38.♘h4 ♕g5 39.♘ef5 ♘xf5 40.♕xf5+ ♕xf5 41.♖e7+ ♔h6 42.♘xf5+ ♔g6 43.♘h4+

1-0

The fatigue, both mental and physical, that seems to affect him when the game is complex also takes its toll on his ability to calculate. Normally an excellent calculator, more often than not Ding fails to find the correct solution when precise calculation is needed. Here is another example from the same Sinquefield Cup:

Maxime **Vachier-Lagrave – Ding** Liren

11th Sinquefield Cup Saint Louis USA (9.5)



In this sharp position Black had only one way to stay in the game. Ding didn't find it.

26...♗g4? A "safe" move, but one that practically loses.

26...♘xh4! Black had to bite the bullet and take the pawn. Now after 27.♕f6 ♕xf6 28.♖xf6 ♘g6 29.♖xd6 h4 30.♗f2 ♔g7 he has enough counterplay because White's pair of bishops isn't very effective and Black has his pawns covered - the pawn on c4 can be defended by ...♗e6 and taking on a6 after 31.♖xa6? ♖d7! loses for White as the threat is ...♖d2, hitting both bishops.

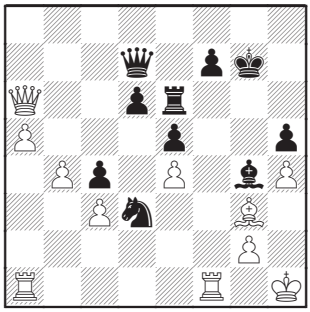
27.♕f2 Black is now helpless against the simple advance of White's pawns on the queenside.

27...♔g7 28.a4 ♖e8 29.♗d1 ♖d7 30.a5 Threatening ♗a4, a threat Ding ignores.

30...♘f4 A desperate counterattack, trying to land a knight on d3.

Even 30...♗xd1 31.♖axd1 ♖e6 32.♔h2 is long-term prospectless for Black, who has way too many weaknesses - a6, c4, d6 and h5 cannot all be protected at all times.

31.♗a4 ♘d3 32.♕b6 ♖e6 33.♗xd7 ♕xd7 34.♕xa6



Black literally has nothing.

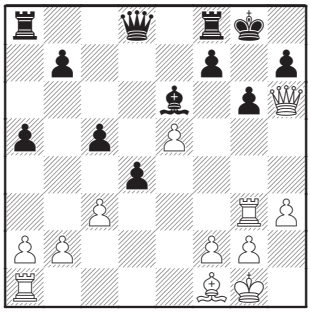
34...♗e2 35.♖f5 ♖g6 36.♔h2 d5 37.♖g5

1-0

The other problem with the lack of mental stamina is his desire to end the game as quickly as possible. This was very apparent in his last tournaments, when at the first sight of a simplification or a draw, Ding never hesitated to take that path, even in very advantageous positions. His last game against Gukesh was a crystal-clear example:

Ding Liren **- Gukesh** D

11th Sinquefield Cup Saint Louis USA (1.4)



20.♗d3? A characteristic moment. Ding sees a chance to force a draw and takes it immediately, in spite of having a pleasant attacking position.

20.♖e1! was strong. White has a safe position, his pieces cannot be chased away from the attacking positions on the kingside and he can try to improve his position by means of ♖e4-h4, h4-h5, ♗d3 etc. The fact that Ding didn't choose even such a safe and at the same time very promising option, speaks a lot about his lack of confidence and ability to withstand the tension of a game of chess played out until its logical end.

20...c4 21.♗e4 21.♗xg6 was already possible.

21...d3 22.♗xg6 Taking the draw. There was nothing better anyway, the chance was missed on move 20.

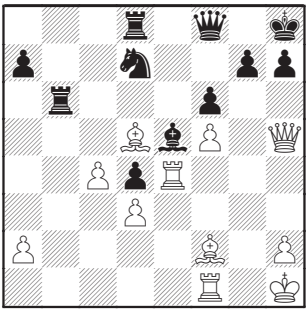
22...fxg6 23.♖xg6+ hxg6 24.♕xg6+ ♔h8 25.♕h6+ ♔g8 26.♕g6+ ♔h8 27.♕h6+ ♔g8 28.♕g6+

½-½

Blunders have also been a problem for Ding, the most famous one being the following:

Magnus **Carlsen - Ding** Liren

12th Norway Chess 2024 Stavanger NOR (6.1)



29...♖b2?? When this move appeared on the board, I realised Ding didn't see White's threat at all. That's why he was spending a lot of time, he thought he had a choice...

29...h6 was the only move to avoid mate. After 30.♗xd4 ♗xd4 31.♖xd4 ♘e5 gives Black decent compensation for the pawn thanks to his well-placed pieces.

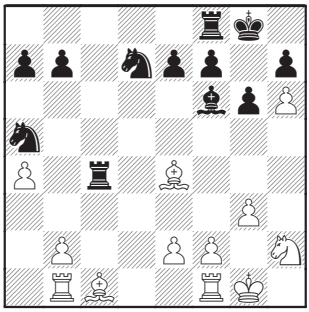
30.♕xh7+ 30.♕xh7+ ♔xh7 31.♖h4#

1-0

The following game from the Olympiad was noted by Hikaru Nakamura as an excellent example of the degradation of the quality of Ding Liren's moves as the game progresses. Starting from a pleasant endgame Ding drifted into a drawn one, then a drawn but unpleasant one, which eventually he even managed to lose.

Ding Liren – **Le** Quang Liem

45th Olympiad 2024 Budapest HUN (6.1),



White has a very comfortable position in the endgame thanks to the pair of bishops in a symmetrical position. Thanks to the double attack on the bishop on e4 and the pawn on a4 Black can win a pawn, but White still keeps the pressure.

19.♗f3 ♖xa4 20.♘g4 The bishop on f6 is short of squares on the long diagonal.

20...♘b3 20...♗h8 kept the bishop alive, though after 21.b3 ♖d4 22.♗e3 ♖d6 23.♖fd1 with a pleasant initiative - the bishops are very powerful.

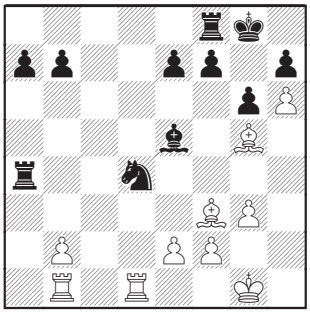
21.♖d1 ♘e5 22.♘xe5 Ding decides to let the bishop on f6 live, keeping his own bishop pair and regaining the pawn, but he had an interesting alternative at his disposal.

22.♘xf6+!? exf6 23.♗e3 was very interesting, the point being that after 23...♘xf3+ 24.exf3 b6 25.♖d6 f5 26.♔f1 White dominates thanks to the superior minor piece and the all-important pawn on h6, which emphasises the weakness of Black's back rank.

22...♗xe5 23.♗g5 White attacks the pawns on e7 and b7 at the same time.

23...♘d4?! This proves to be an unstable construction.

23...♗d6 24.♗xb7 ♖b4 25.♗g2 a5 would have allowed Black bigger stability on the dark squares.



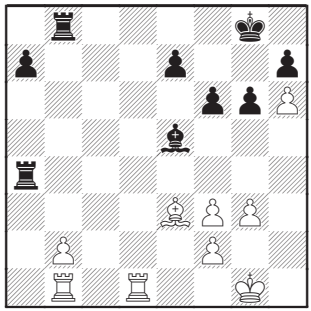
24.♗xb7? Natural, but worse than the alternative. As the next two moves show, this allows Black to improve the position of his king.

24.♗xe7! ♖e8 *(24...♘xf3+ 25.exf3 ♖e8 26.♖d7 is given as winning for White by the engine. The reason is the weak black king and the fact that White threatens a quick ♖bd1 and ♖d8.)* 25.♗c5 ♘xf3+ 26.exf3 b6 27.b3 ♖a2 28.♗e3 the engine gives White a stable advantage thanks to the mobility of his kingside pawns and the fact that Black's king is weak due to the constant possibility of threats along the eighth rank.

24...♖b8! 24...♘xe2+?! 25.♔g2 threatens ♖e1. 25...♗f6 26.♗xf6 exf6 27.♖d7 and Black still suffers with a weak king and a possible attack on the f7-pawn after ♗d5 and the second white rook coming to the seventh rank.

25.♗f3 f6! Now Black manages to get some breathing space for the king and is no longer worse. Perhaps Ding thought that the game should end in a draw very soon as the remaining pawns on the queenside are eliminated, but things turn out to be not so simple.

26.♗e3 ♘xf3+ 27.exf3



27...♗d6! Le senses the moment that for the first time in the game it is Black who can press now.

The immediate 27...♖xb2 was also possible as Black manages to cover the pawn on e7 after 28.♖xb2 ♗xb2 29.♖d7 ♔f7 30.♗c5 ♖a1+ 31.♔g2 ♖e1 but this is just a dead draw.

28.♖a1 ♖xa1 29.♖xa1 ♖xb2 30.♖xa7 The position is a draw, but it transpires that the pawn on h6, which was a big asset for White earlier, confining Black's king to the eighth rank, not becomes a liability as it's hard to defend after ...g5, followed by ...♔f7-g6. The tables have turned and now it is White who needs to be a little careful. When we started our analysis we saw Ding with the more pleasant position and pressing, but he misplayed it and now he is the one that needs to exert care.

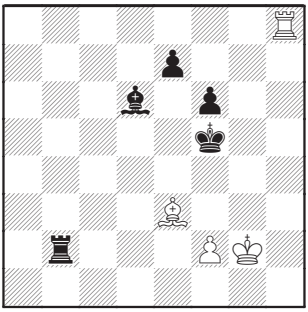
30...g5 Intending ...♔f7-g6.

31.♖a8+ ♔f7 32.f4 gxf4 33.gxf4 ♔g6 34.♖g8+ Giving up the pawn, but reducing the material.

34.f5+ was an alternative, not giving up the pawn because of the idea 34...♔xf5 35.♖h8 and Black cannot defend the pawn on h7 as 35...♔g6 36.♖g8+ ♔f5 37.♖g7 leads to White capturing on h7.

34...♔xh6 35.f5+ ♔h5 36.♖g7 White goes after the h7-pawn, but loses the f5-pawn in the process. In view of the very reduced material, this shouldn't have mattered as White should be able to make a relatively easy draw.

36...♖b5 37.♖xh7+ ♔g4 38.♔g2 ♖b2 39.♖h8 ♔xf5



40.♗c5 Ding decides to enter a rook endgame. A matter of choice, as he could have kept the bishops on the board, too.

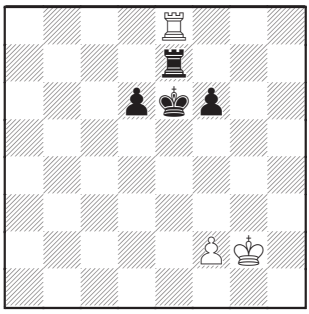
40...♖b7!? Le invites a rook endgame but at least one where he gets a passed pawn.

40...♗xc5 41.♖h5+ is an elementary draw after White recaptures the bishop on c5. With 2 vs 1 without a passed pawn Black has no chances to play for a win.

41.♗xd6 exd6 42.♖d8 ♔e6 43.♖e8+ Somewhere around here it appears that Ding started to lose the plot and plays carelessly. The check doesn't spoil anything, but it made more sense to bring the king to the centre with 43.♔f3.

Richard Rapport stood as Ding's pillar in the last match in Astana. Will he once again provide the support Ding needs? *Photo: Michal Walusza*

43...♖e7



44.♖a8? Strangely enough, the losing mistake.

44.♖d8! rooks behind passed pawns was valid here as well! After 44...d5 45.♔f3 ♔e5 46.♔e3 White draws as Black cannot play ...d4 since with the rook on d8 White simply takes the pawn. Compare this position to the comment to White's 46th move, 46.♔e3, to see the difference.

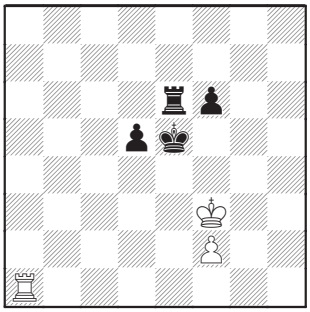
44...d5! 45.♔f3 ♔e5 46.♖a1 White's problem is that after 46.♔e3 d4+ 47.♔d3

♔f4! cuts the white king from the kingside and Black wins after 48.♔xd4 ♖e2 which will eventually lead to the Lucena position when the Black pawn reaches the f2-square;

46.♖a4 d4 47.♖a5+ ♔d6! again cuts White's king off, this time from the passed d-pawn.

46...♖e6? Allowing a saving opportunity.

46...♖c7! was correct as White doesn't have a useful move, for example 47.♖a4 ♖c3+ 48.♔e2 d4 and Black keeps advancing in a similar fashion to the game.



47.♖a4? But Ding misses it.

47.♖e1+! ♔d6 48.♖a1 was the saving idea. Black's pieces are awkwardly placed and he cannot advance conveniently. 48...♔c5 *(48...d4 49.♖a6+ ♔d5 50.♖xe6 ♔xe6 51.♔e4 and Black loses the extra pawn with a drawn pawn endgame; 48...♖e4 49.♖a8 keeps the rook active when White can give checks either from the side or from behind.)* 49.♔f4! is the key move - White threatens ♔f5, but the king is also close enough to come back to the e-file to fight against the passed d-pawn. 49...d4 *(or 49...♖d6 50.♔e3! involving the king in the defence against the passed pawn; 49...♔c4 50.♖c1+ ♔b3 51.♖d1 ♖d6 52.♔e3! is similar.)* 50.♔f5 ♖d6 51.♔e4! and the king makes it back in time again.

47...♖b6 Black is winning again.

48.♔e2 d4 Black advances now.

49.f3 f5 50.♖a5+ ♔f4 51.♖d5 ♖b2+ 52.♔e1 ♖h2 With a cut off king on the first rank White has no chances.

53.♔f1 53.♖xd4+ ♔e3 wins the rook.

53...♔xf3 54.♖xf5+ ♔e3 55.♖e5+ ♔d2 56.♖a5 White's problem is that his rook is on the "short" side, so the side checks can easily be dealt with.

56...♖h1+ 57.♔f2 d3 58.♖a8 ♖h7 59.♖a2+ ♔c3 60.♖a3+ ♔c2 61.♖a2+ ♔b3 62.♖a8 ♖e7

0-1

A very poor loss, clearly indicating Ding's difficulty in maintaining a consistently high level of play throughout the game.

With all the damning characteristics we mentioned above, it is not surprising that nearly everyone believes the match is already lost. Some have even suggested that Ding might as well resign without playing. What chance does Ding possibly have in the upcoming match? Has there been any positive indication he can build upon?

The simple answer is no. At World Championship level, he stands no chance with the level he has displayed so far, including at the Olympiad. According to Fischer and Carlsen's observations above, Ding should continue to struggle.

Ding needs a miracle—a miracle that will, out of nowhere, make him enjoy chess again, make him feel free again, and ultimately allow him to play chess as he knows he can.

It goes against the narrative, but I will venture that Ding will surprise us. He may not win the match, but he won't be a walkover. There is no such thing as an easy World Championship match, and this one won't be either.

THE CHALLENGER

Gukesh is the exact opposite of everything we've said about Ding above. Full of confidence, showing high-level chess, and able to withstand and sustain tension throughout his games, he possesses a killer instinct that drives him to fight until the end.

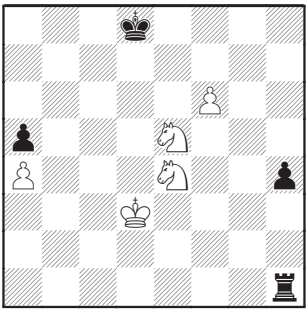
If we apply Fischer and Carlsen's observations, we see him as a stable player who has demonstrated very high-level chess over a prolonged period, which we can also expect in the match.

These superlatives are well-deserved. Nobody becomes a Challenger by chance, and even more so at the age of 18—the youngest ever in history. At 18, players are typically unburdened by psychological problems arising outside the chessboard, which is another big plus for Gukesh.

To illustrate Gukesh's strengths, here's a reminder from the last issue of *BCM* in shortened form. Both games are from the Olympiad and showcase his perseverance, ability to maintain tension until the end, and a killer instinct that leaves no chances.

Gukesh D – **Wei** Yi

45th Olympiad 2024 Budapest HUN (7.1)



This was the decisive game of the blockbuster match India-China. The first surprise of the match was the absence of Ding Liren on board one for China - after losing to Le Quang

Wei Yi and Gukesh
Photo: Michal Walusza

Liem he decided to skip the game against his Challenger, who prior to this game won all his games. Wei Yi stepped in and with all the other games drawn, this was the last game to finish. The endgame was drawn for a long time, but Gukesh kept looking for chances and posing problems. By here he managed to make it very difficult for his opponent since in a very sharp position and with little time on the clock it was hard for Wei Yi to find the narrow path to a draw.

71...h3? The losing mistake. It's hard to blame Wei Yi, because the drawing line was impossible to see.

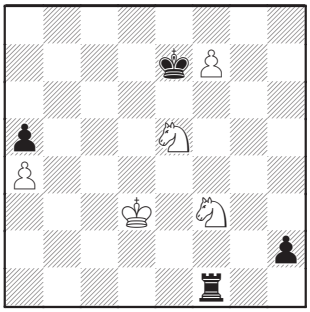
71...♖d1+! is the only move. The hard part was to understand that after 72.♔c4 h3 73.f7 ♖c1+*! (again strictly the only move!) 74.♔d3 (74.♔b5 ♖f1! and Black draws.)* 74...♔e7! 75.♘g5 h2 76.♘g6+ ♔d7 77.f8♕ h1♕ White has the move and a queen and two knights around Black's lone king, but there is no mate.

72.f7 ♖f1 72...♔e7 also loses to 73.♘g5 ♖d1+ 74.♔c4 ♖c1+ 75.♔b5! this makes all the difference compared to the saving line above, where it didn't work. 75...h2 *(75...♖f1 76.♘g6+ ♔d6 77.f8♕+ ♖xf8 78.♘xf8 h2 79.♘e4+ and White is right on time to stop the h-pawn.)* 76.♘g6+ ♔d7 77.f8♕ h1♕

78.♘e5+ now this leads to mate, as the king on b5 takes away squares from the black one.

73.♘g5 h2 74.♘gf3 White blocks the f-file and threatens to promote with check.

74...♔e7



74...h1♕ 75.f8♕+ ♔c7 76.♕e7+ ♔b6 77.♘c4+ leads to mate.

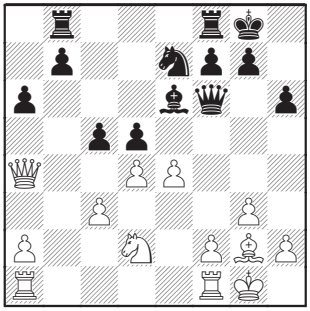
75.♘xh2 The rest is simple as Black cannot stop the f7-pawn from promoting without giving up his rook for it.

75...♖a1 76.♘hg4 ♖a3+ 77.♔d2 ♖xa4 78.♘h6 ♖a2+ 79.♔e3 ♖a3+ 80.♔e4 Black cannot stop ♘g6 as 80...♖g3 runs into 81.♘f5.

1-0

Gukesh D - Fabiano Caruana

45th Olympiad 2024 Budapest HUN (10.1)



Black's last move was 15...c5 and White immediately takes advantage of it.

16.♕a3! White now puts pressure on Black's centre.

16...b6 17.♖ab1 17.♕xa6?! cxd4 18.cxd4 ♕xd4 is good for Black, who exchanged his a-pawn for White's central d-pawn.

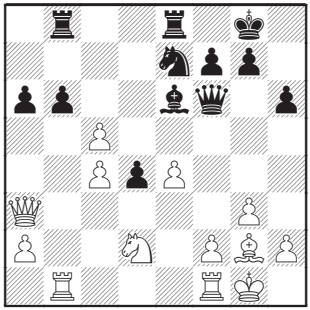
17...♖fe8 Black defends the knight on e7 as it can become vulnerable if the queen is to leave its defence from the f6-square.

18.dxc5 18.e5 ♕f5 is unclear. Taking the pawn on a6 again gives Black counterplay after 19.♕xa6 cxd4 20.cxd4 ♖a8 21.♕xb6 ♖xa2

18...d4?! Caruana plays sharply.

18...bxc5 was fine for Black and, more importantly, simpler. After 19.♖xb8 ♖xb8 20.♕xc5 ♖b2 Black has counterplay for the pawn.

19.c4?!



Gukesh wants to stabilise the position in the centre, but this is not the best decision.

19.♖xb6 dxc3 20.♘b3 was better. White controls the pawn on c3 and has firm protection of his own passed pawn on c5. 20...♖bd8 21.♕b4 and Black's compensation is questionable.

19...♕g5! This double attack on the knight on d2 and the pawn on c5 allows Black to equalise.

20.♖fd1 bxc5 20...♕xc5 was a safer alternative as 21.♕xa6 d3 the knight is coming to c6 and then either e5 or d4, with sufficient counterplay.

21.f4 White uses the queen's position to gain space on the kingside. Play becomes forcing now.

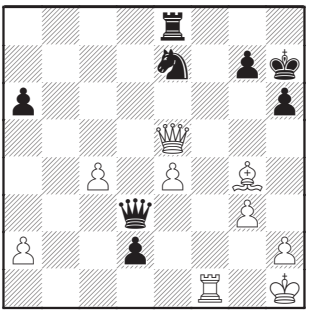
21...♕h5 22.f5 ♖xb1 23.♖xb1 ♕e2! The only way to stay in the game.

24.fxe6 ♕xd2 25.exf7+ ♔xf7 26.♕xc5 Threatening ♕h5 and ♖f1, so Black must move the king.

26...♔g8 27.♖f1 ♔h7 28.♕e5 ♕e3+ 29.♔h1 d3 Black's passed pawn gives him enough compensation for the pawn, but the position remains very sharp.

30.♗h3 White activates the bishop.

30...d2 31.♗g4 ♕d3

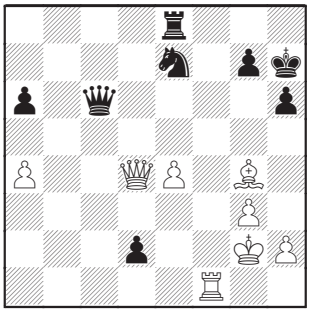


The human way.

Black had a tremendous resource after 31...♖d8! 32.♕xe7 d1♕ 33.♖xd1 *(or 33.♗xd1 ♖xd1! 34.♖xd1 ♕f3+ picking up the rook on d1 with check and a draw.)* 33...♖xd1+ 34.♗xd1 ♕f2! *this is the pretty idea. White cannot avoid losing the bishop with check. (34...♕e1+ is the more human move and it also works: 35.♔g2 ♕xd1 and the queen endgame should be drawn in spite of Black being two pawns down, but this is not immediately obvious.)* 35.h4 ♕f1+ 36.♔h2 ♕f2+! 37.♔h3 ♕f1+ to avoid draw White must play 38.♔g4 ♕xd1+ 39.♔f4 but after 39...♕f1+ 40.♔e5 ♕xc4 Black should draw as the exposed king on e5 and the attack on the pawn on a2 give enough counterplay to save Black.

32.♔g2 ♕xc4 33.a4 ♕c6 Black regained the pawn and position is finely balanced.

34.♕d4



34...♕g6? Immediately after restoring material parity, Caruana makes the decisive error. It was high time to start playing with the other pieces, not just the queen. Black's last developing move was 17...♖fe8, which was 17 moves ago!

34...♘g6 was natural, improving the position of the knight as it aims for the beautiful e5-square. Caruana may have been worried about the pin after 35.♗f5 but Black has more than one way of dealing with it. 35...♔h8 this appears to be the simplest. Black gives up the pawn on d2 but after *(35...♕c2* is the more energetic way, not giving up the pawn on d2. *36.♔h3 ♕c1 37.♕f2 ♖e5* with a tense position.*)* 36.♕xd2 ♘e5 his untouchable blockading knight on e5 ensures against any danger; 34...♘g8 was another way to improve the knight's position. 35.♗f5+ ♔h8 36.♕xd2 ♕xa4 is fine for Black.

35.♖f4! Domination - the rook secures the e4-pawn and defends the bishop on g4. Black's pieces are awfully uncoordinated. Gukesh doesn't forgive and wraps the game up without allowing any counterplay.

35...♕g5 36.h4 Forcing the queen back.

36...♕g6 36...♕a5 defends the pawn on d2, but loses to 37.♖f7 and the mate on g7 can only be defended by losing the knight after 37...♖g8 38.♖xe7.

37.♕xd2 This time Black is a pawn down with no compensation at all. His pieces are still very constrained and Caruana finally tries to improve them, but it's already too late.

37...♖b8 38.♕d7 h5 39.♗e6 ♖b6 40.♗f7 Forcing the exchange of queens and winning another pawn in the process.

40...♕d6 41.♕xd6 ♖xd6 42.♗xh5 Two pawns up is more than enough.

42...♘c6 43.♗e2 a5 44.♗b5 ♘e5 45.♖f5 ♖e6 46.♔f2

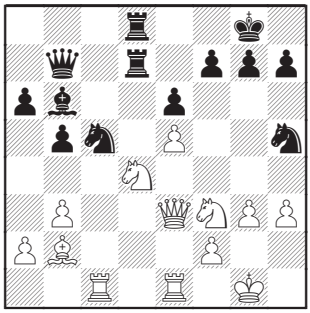
1-0

Unlike Ding Liren, who decided not to play anything after the Olympiad, Gukesh played the European Club Cup, which ended approximately one month before the start of the match. He started very well, winning his first two games, but then seemingly ran out of steam. He drew his third game, lost the fourth and drew the remaining three, resulting in a 11-rating point loss.

After the two convincing victories, Gukesh misplayed a very promising position in the third round against GM Rauf Mamedov.

Gukesh D - Rauf **Mamedov**

39th European Chess Club Cup
Hotel Zepter, Vrnjacka Banja (3)



White has an obvious advantage due to the fact that the knight on h5 is in danger of being trapped. For the time being Black relies on tactics to keep the knight alive, but had White played a precise move now, this would not have helped.

24.♖c2? This loses the advantage. Unsurprisingly, White had a stronger move at his disposal.

24.g4? ♘f4! is the tactic that keeps Black alive, as 25.♕xf4 is met by 25...♘d3; 24.♖cd1! was the correct move. White covers the d3-square, thus avoiding ...♘d3 jumps, and threatens g4. 24...♗a5 trying to keep White occupied and not give him time to push g4. *(24...f5 is another attempt, but after 25.g4 fxg4 26.hxg4 ♖f8 27.gxh5 ♖df7 28.♘g5 ♖xf2 29.♕xf2 ♖xf2 30.♔xf2 White's two rooks and a knight should overcome the black queen. Perhaps this was the line that confused Gukesh.)* 25.♗c3 ♗xc3 26.♕xc3 ♖d5 27.♕e3 again threatening g4. 27...g6 freeing the g7-square for the knight. 28.♖c1 and with the subsequent doubling of the rooks on the c-file White successfully transfers the game to the queenside, where Black's stranded knight on h5 cannot help.

24...h6 25.h4 A rather vague move that doesn't change the position. It seems

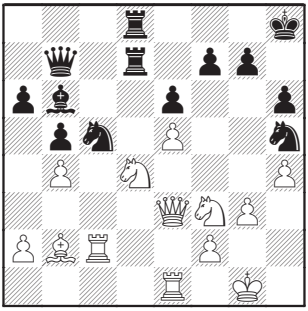
Gukesh couldn't find his way through the complexities of the position - his desire to trap the knight on h5 while at the same time keep Black's tactical counterplay at bay, but objectively this was no longer possible.

25.g4? ♘f4 still doesn't work.

25...♔h8? Mamedov also struggles in this complex position.

It was time to set the knight free with 25...f5! 26.exf6 ♘xf6 and Black is fine, but he had to see that after 27.♘xe6 ♖e8 28.♘xc5 ♖xe3 29.♘xb7 ♖xf3 30.♘c5 ♗xc5 31.♖xc5 ♖d2 32.♗xf6 ♖xf6 he regains the pawn with a drawn double-rook endgame.

26.b4!



Gukesh takes the second chance.

26...♘a4 27.♗a1 ♕a7 28.♖d1 f5 Without a knight on c5 and the ...♘d3 resource, this is the only way to stop White's threat of g4.

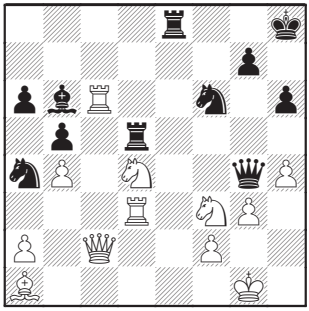
29.exf6 ♘xf6 30.♕xe6 ♖d6 Black cannot take on d4 in view of the weakness of the back rank after 30...♗xd4 31.♖xd4 ♖xd4 32.♗xd4 ♖xd4 33.♘xd4 ♕xd4 34.♖c8+! ♔h7 35.♕f5+ g6 36.♖c7+ and Black gets mated.

31.♕b3 White won a pawn and should have a technically winning position if not for the fact that there are still a lot of pieces on the board and tension in the centre. Usually a tremendous calculator, Gukesh would usually navigate these complexities superbly, but this time he uncharacteristically failed.

31...♖d5 32.♖c6! ♕d7 32...♗xd4 33.♖xd4 ♖xd4 34.♘xd4 ♖xd4 35.♖c8+ ♔h7 36.♕c2+ ♘e4 37.♔g2 is similar to later in the game, when Black is deadly pinned on the b1-h7 diagonal.

33.♕c2 ♕g4 34.♖d3 ♖e8 Black tries to fish in muddy waters, but this allows a tactical shot by White.

34...♗xd4 again doesn't work in view of 35.♘xd4 ♖xd4 36.♗xd4 ♖xd4 37.♖xd4 ♕xd4 38.♖c8+ ♘g8 39.♕b3 and the knight on g8 is lost.



35.♕d2 Not bad, as it keeps the advantage, but the tension still persists.

35.♖xf6! gxf6 36.♕c6 was an effective sacrifice that defuses the tension and makes it easier to play. After 36...♖ed8 37.♕xf6+ ♕g7 38.♕f4 White is winning as Black won't be able to survive the weaknesses on the long diagonal.

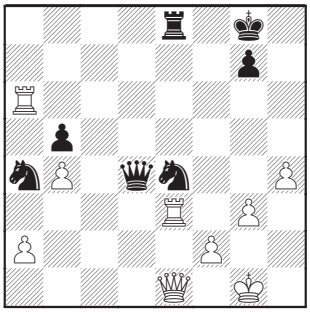
35...♘e4 36.♕e1 ♕d7 37.♖e3! Gukesh finally finds a way to dissolve the tension in the centre.

37...♗xd4 38.♘xd4 ♖xd4 39.♖xh6+! ♔g8 39...gxh6 40.♖xe4 is White's idea,

when Black loses material because of the pin on the long diagonal.

40.♗xd4 40.♖g6 was a bit more precise, as White wins a tempo compared to the game, but both moves should win.

40...♕xd4 41.♖xa6?!



This lets Black back into the game.

41.♖g6! ♘ac3 42.♖g4 planning a slow a3 and eventually f3 would have won material for White, while 42...♕xb4 43.f3 wins the knight on e4.

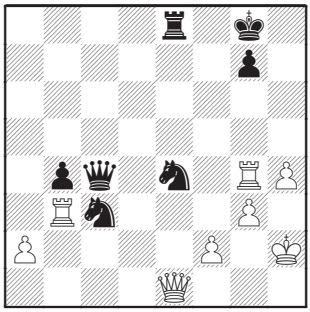
41...♘ac3 42.♖a3 ♖c8 Black successfully avoided massive material losses because of the pin on the e-file and can be reasonably happy with the outcome of the tactical melee.

43.♖f3 43.♔g2 was an alternative, though after 43...♕xb4 44.♖b3 ♕c4 45.f3 ♖a8! 46.♖bxc3! ♖xa2+ 47.♔g1 ♘xc3 48.♕xc3 ♕xc3 49.♖xc3 b4 Black should draw the rook endgame since White's king is cut off on the first rank.

43...♕xb4 44.♖b3 ♕c4 45.♔h2 b4 Black is safe now with the knights stable in the centre. If anybody, now it is White who should exercise care.

46.♖f4 ♖e8 47.♖g4? It's hard for anybody to adjust properly when from a winning position the situation changes to an equal one. Gukesh makes a losing mistake.

47.♖b2 kept the status quo, though the knights are tricky when this close. White controls them for the time being, but he needs to be careful to continue to do so.



47...♕c5? Missing a golden opportunity.

47...♕c8! was winning more or less on the spot. The queen not only attacks the rook on g4, but it also defends the rook on e8, allowing the knight on e4 to move. After 48.♖f4 ♘xg3! Black wins material and the game after 49.♕xe8+ ♕xe8 50.fxg3 ♕e2+ 51.♔h3 ♘d1! creating mating threats against the white king. *(perhaps the players thought that after 51...♘xa2 52.♖fxb4 ♘xb4 53.♖xb4 White has a fortress, but Black wasn't forced to go for this line.)*

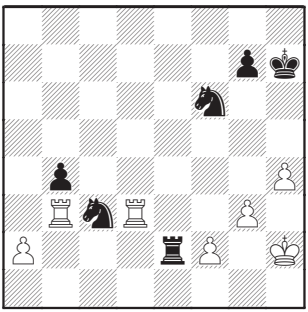
48.♖f4 ♕c4 Perhaps Mamedov noticed what he missed and hoped for a repetition...?

49.♖f3! But Gukesh won't allow him a second chance!

49...♘f6 50.♕d2 ♖e2 51.♕d8+ ♔h7 52.♕d3+? Giving Black a second winning chance.

52.♖xf6! was better because after 52...gxf6 53.♕xf6 White has enough counterplay against Black's naked king, with perpetual check always a possibility.

52...♕xd3 53.♖xd3



53...♘xa2? Which Mamedov misses. The move is natural, preserving the passed b4-pawn, but with three pawns on the kingside White can sacrifice his rook for that pawn and a knight and reach a fortress.

53...♖xf2+! 54.♔h3 ♖xa2 55.♖xb4 ♘ce4 was correct, as the knights create mating threats and here sacrificing a rook for a knight isn't enough.

54.♖f3! Defending the pawn on f2. Now White draws by capturing the pawn on b4 and establishing a fortress.

54...♘e4 55.♔g2 ♘c5 56.♖b1 b3 Forcing the inevitable exchange operation.

57.♖bxb3 ♘xb3 58.♖xb3 Black cannot break through now. If he sends the king towards the f2-pawn it will lead to a loss or exchange of his last remaining pawn.

58...♖c2 59.♖b7 ♘c1 60.♖d7 ♖c3 61.♖e7 ♔g6 62.♖e6+ ♔f5 63.♖e7 ♔f6 64.♖e4 ♘b3 65.♖f4+ ♔g6 66.♖f3 ♖xf3

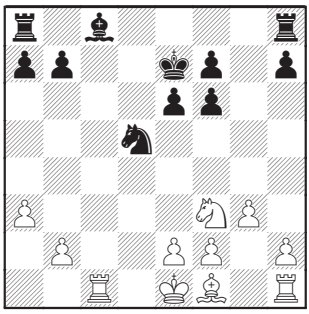
½-½

A very uneven game by Gukesh, going from a winning to a losing position and then allowing a second winning chance to his opponent later in the game. This game marked a drop in the level of Gukesh's play and this was shown in the next round when he lost to GM Dmitry Andreikin.

This game was marked by an erroneous plan that Gukesh chose in the equal endgame that arose immediately after the opening.

Dmitry **Andreikin – Gukesh** D

39th European Chess Club Cup
Hotel Zepter, Vrnjacka Banja (4)



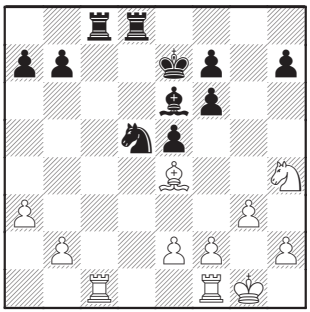
The endgame is equal as Black's damaged kingside structure cannot easily be approached. Black needs to decide how to finish development now.

16...e5?! The wrong plan, at least from a practical perspective, since it makes White's play much easier and puts Black on the defensive. It may seem natural, it allows the bishop to be developed on a more active square on e6, it limits the knight on f3 by controlling the d4-square, but it weakens the f5-square, something that White can take advantage of.

16...♗d7 was simplest, intending to oppose a rook on the c-file. The tactical justification is that 17.e4 *(17.♗g2 ♖hc8 is just dead equal.)* 17...♘b6 18.♖c7?! is met by 18...♖hc8! and White cannot take the pawn on b7 as 19.♖xb7 ♖c2 gives Black a big advantage.

17.♗g2 ♗e6 18.♘h4! White intends ♗e4 and ♘f5, to establish a bind on the kingside.

18...♖ac8 19.0-0 ♖hd8 20.♗e4 White's play is easy and natural while Black needs to defend. It wasn't really necessary for Black to allow this.



20...h6?! Another natural move, but this increases Black's difficulties. It was already time to search for more drastic solutions.

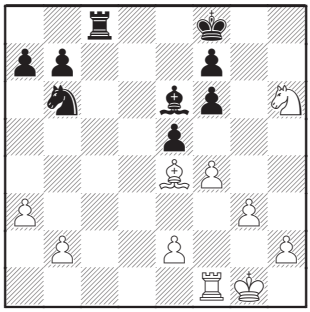
20...♘b6! is the engine's solution, but one that is very hard for a human, leaving two pawns en prise. The point of the move is to defend the rook on c8 and open the d-file so that the counter-attacking resource ...♖d2 becomes available. 21.♗xb7 *(or 21.♗xh7 ♖d2 22.♗d3 ♖xb2 23.♘f5+ ♔f8 24.♘d6 and now either the passive, but good enough 24...♖b8 or 24...♖xc1 25.♖xc1 ♘d5 with dynamic equality.)* 21...♖xc1 22.♖xc1 ♖d2 23.♔f1 ♖xb2 24.♗e4 ♘c4 25.♗xh7 a5 with enough counterplay on the queenside.

21.♘f5+ ♔f8 21...♗xf5? 22.♗xf5 is really bad as the bishop dominates, especially by forcing Black to abandon the c-file. After 22...♖c6 23.♖xc6 bxc6 24.♖c1 Black's position is full of weaknesses.

22.♖xc8 ♖xc8 23.♘xh6 ♘b6 A few moves too late. White should be able to stabilise the position now.

24.f4?! White is wary of Black's activity and seeks his own dynamism to deter Black from play on the queenside. Objectively this is worse than 24.♖d1, but from a practical perspective fighting for the initiative is often rewarded.

24.♖d1! was the best way, though it was not an easy move to make. After 24...♘c4 25.♗f5! ♔g7 26.♗xe6 fxe6 27.♘g4 White remains a pawn up as 27...b5 *(27...♘xb2? 28.♖d7+ is just bad for Black.)* 28.♖c1 ♖d8 29.b3 ♘xa3 30.♖c6 ♔f7 31.h4 when Black's scattered forces cannot deal with the advance of the h-pawn and defence of the pawn weaknesses.



24...♘c4?! Gukesh fails to find the best chance.

24...exf4! 25.♖xf4 ♘c4 was better because it didn't allow the binding f5 as in the game. The engine assesses this position as equal, though this wasn't that obvious to the players during the game. 26.♘g4 *(26.♖xf6? ♔g7 loses material; 26.♗xb7 ♖b8 27.♗f3 ♖xb2 gives Black apparent counterplay.)* 26...♘xb2 27.♗xb7 *(27.♘xf6 b5 activates Black's queenside majority.)* 27...♖c3 28.♘xf6 ♖xa3 Black is pawn down, but his a-pawn should provide enough counterplay for a draw.

25.f5! ♗d7 26.♘g4 White returns the knight to the game with tempo.

26...♔e7 27.♗xb7 ♖g8 27...♖b8 28.♗d5 ♘xb2 29.♘e3 is winning for White - Black has no counterplay, his knight on b2 is out of play and he's still a pawn down.

28.h3?! White is understandably unwilling to send his knight back to h6, though that is what the engine indicates as strongest.

28.♘h6! tempo play is necessary. 28...♖h8 29.♗a6! ♘d6 *(29...♘xb2 30.♘g4 with ♘e3*

next, keeps White in control.) 30.♘g4 ♗xf5 31.♘e3 and White stabilises the position.

28...♘d6! Black is back in the game now.

29.♗d5 ♗xf5?! Imprecise play by Gukesh.

29...♘xf5! was stronger. The bishop defends the seventh rank while the knight can jump to d4. At the same time the pawn on g3 is attacked. 30.♔h2 ♖xg4! 31.hxg4 ♘e3 is a nice tactic that simplifies the position to a drawn one.

30.♖c1! White again has the initiative now.

30...♗xg4 31.hxg4 ♔d7 Black stops ♖c7.

31...♖xg4 32.♖c7+ ♔d8 33.♖xa7 looks dangerous for Black, allowing two connected passed pawns, but it was the better chance. After 33...♖xg3+ 34.♔f2 ♖g4 we get a similar position to the game where Black has good drawing chances.

32.♖c6 ♖xg4 33.♖a6 ♖xg3+ 34.♔f2 ♖h3 The engine wants to keep the rook on the fourth rank, but this should also suffice.

35.♖xa7+ ♔c8 36.a4 ♖h4 Gukesh comes to the same realisation but a few moves later. The lost time means that even though Black should draw, he should find an incredibly difficult line to do so.

37.♖a6 ♔c7 38.a5

38...♖d4? This allows White to rearrange his pieces in an optimal way. The drawing line was anything but easy.

38...♖b4! was correct. The problem for Black was that after 39.♖c6+ ♔d7 40.♖c2 he needed to understand that he needs to pass time and play 40...♔d8!! when White cannot make progress while the idea behind the king move is to allow for the double attack ...♖b5 without allowing ♗c6 with check. Impossible to understand this on the last moves before time control. 41.a6 *(41.♔e3? ♖b5 wins the pawn on a5.)* 41...♖a4 42.♗b7 and now another difficult move 42...♔e7! threatening to take on b7 and play ...♖b4, avoiding a check with ♖c8.

39.♖c6+! ♔d7 40.♖c5 With the black king cut off along the c-file Black cannot fight the advance of the white pawns.

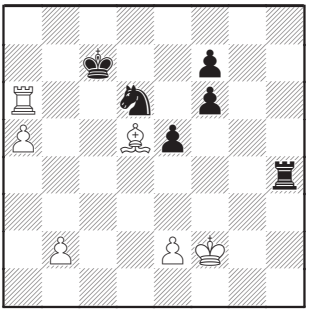
40...♘e4+ The rook endgame is lost more easily than the alternatives.

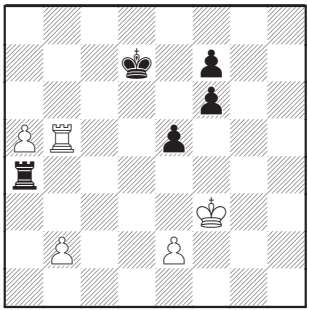
40...♖a4? 41.♗c6+ is the problem that haunts Black in many of these lines.; 40...♔d8 41.♔e1 ♖a4 42.♔d2 with ♔c3 and b4 should also win for White.

41.♗xe4 ♖xe4 42.♖b5! Preventing ...♖b4 and allowing for b4.

42...♖a4 43.♔f3? Curiously enough, this gives Black a last chance to save the game.

43.b3 ♖a3 44.b4 was simple and straightforward.





43...♔e6? But Black misses it.

43...♔c6! 44.♖b6+ ♔c7 45.b4 f5 and it turns out the white king is in the wrong place - it is far from the queenside to support his pawns while getting there now would allow Black to advance his own pawns to create counterplay.

44.♖b6+ ♔d5 45.b4 Black cannot stop the mechanism of a6, b5, ♖b7 etc. with automatic promotion.

45...f5 46.a6 ♖a3+ 47.♔f2 f4 48.b5 f3 49.♖b7 fxe2 50.a7 f5 51.b6

1-0

While there were several moments where Black's decisions were very difficult, this was still a game that Gukesh shouldn't have lost. In the remaining three games, he didn't have winning chances, and the draws were a normal result.

These last games at the European Club Cup will serve Gukesh well if they keep him grounded after his series of incredible results. They indicate that he still has work to do, that sometimes he can miss chances and allow them, so knowing this before the match is a useful warning sign.

As a result of the hard work leading up to the match, participants usually manage to raise their level during it. I expect both Gukesh and Ding to do so, though to what extent remains to be seen.

Generally speaking, if everything proceeds as it has up to now, Gukesh should win the match comfortably. But will it?

IT'S CHALLENGING TO PREPARE BOTH OPEN AND CLOSED GAMES FOR A MATCH, BUT IF GUKESH RELIES ON DING LIREN'S PREDICTABILITY AND LIMITED REPERTOIRE, THIS MAY BECOME A VIABLE STRATEGY

MATCH STRATEGY AND OPENINGS

When a player is lacking in confidence, as Ding Liren is, the usual strategy is to play safely to settle into the match and start feeling comfortable. Ding tried this in some of the tournaments he played, making quick draws, but this strategy never worked for him because eventually, he started losing. Things will need to change in the match: even if he begins by playing for draws, at some point, he will have to start playing more ambitiously.

I expect this will be his approach in Singapore—starting slowly and cautiously, then gradually easing into the match.

For Gukesh, the strategy will be the opposite. He should apply as much pressure as possible from the start, not allowing Ding to gain confidence and composure with draws. An early win by Gukesh could derail Ding easily and shatter his fragile composure. Gukesh should strive for this, while Ding must try to avoid it at all costs. The start of the match will determine everything. If Ding manages to keep the score level, his chances will improve; otherwise, the uphill task of coming from behind may prove too much.

Ever since the Kramnik-Leko match in 2004, when Leko employed an opening strategy of changing his defences in every game with Black (unfortunately for him, the only time he repeated an opening was in the final game, where he needed only a draw to become World Champion), players have tended to prepare two openings for the black pieces—one main defence and one back-up. It's expected that both players will follow this path, though surprises shouldn't be ruled out.

For Ding Liren, the main question will be whether he will stick to his usual repertoire, the one he used against Nepomniachtchi: the Ruy López and the Marshall with Black against 1.e4, and the Queen's Gambit

Declined against 1.d4. In Astana, he ventured the French Defence in one game, which worked very well opening-wise, though he ultimately lost in time trouble. He has extensive experience with these openings and has put tremendous work into them over the years, but relying on them could make him predictable—something Nepomniachtchi exploited in Astana by introducing various creative ideas. An intermediate strategy might be to introduce surprises within these openings, exploring sub-variations—a strategy well-known since the countless battles in the Queen's Gambit Declined during the Karpov-Kasparov matches of the 1980s.

With the white pieces, Ding has always preferred closed openings, making 1.d4 and 1.c4 his main choices. He used both against Nepomniachtchi. This year, he experimented with 1.e4 in several tournaments, but my impression is that this was more of a decoy than a serious intention for the match.

With Gukesh, things are more complex.

With Black against 1.d4, he has employed one of the "usual suspects" in opening setups—the Nimzo-Indian/Ragozin combination, made popular since Carlsen's intended use in his 2013 match against Anand. He also used the Queen's Gambit Accepted in his must-not-lose game in the final round of the Candidates against Nakamura.

Generally, there are only a few rock-solid openings against 1.d4 deemed "worthy" of a World Championship match, namely the Nimzo-Indian, Queen's Gambit Declined,

DING NEEDS A MIRACLE—A MIRACLE THAT WILL, OUT OF NOWHERE, MAKE HIM ENJOY CHESS AGAIN, MAKE HIM FEEL FREE AGAIN, AND ULTIMATELY ALLOW HIM TO PLAY CHESS AS HE KNOWS HE CAN

HISTORY WILL BE MADE ONE WAY OR ANOTHER: EITHER WE'LL WITNESS THE YOUNGEST WORLD CHAMPION EVER, OR WE'LL SEE A COMPLETELY UNEXPECTED VICTORY BY THE UNDERDOG.

and occasionally the Semi-Tarrasch, though it tends to be somewhat riskier. The Slav Defence and the Queen's Gambit Accepted complete the list of solid openings, with only the Grünfeld Defence as a more dynamic option.

Gukesh will need to decide which will be his main opening and which one will serve as a backup. All the above options are possible since he's used all except the Grünfeld Defence. While a powerful opening, it requires extensive memorisation, and one lapse can quickly lead to a loss—just recall the first game of the Anand-Topalov match in 2010.

Gukesh is also harder to predict with the white pieces, as he has played everything: 1.e4, 1.d4, and 1.c4, while in his youth he almost always opened with 1.♘f3. He doesn't appear to have a clear preference, giving him greater flexibility in his opening choices. When preparing for his matches, Kasparov would decide on his main opening thrust—1.e4 or 1.d4—and concentrate all his resources in that direction. It's challenging to prepare both open and closed games for a match, but if Gukesh relies on Ding Liren's predictability and limited repertoire, this may become a viable strategy, with targeted preparation against Ding's preferred defences against both 1.e4 and 1.d4.

A fascinating match awaits us. History will be made one way or another: either we'll witness the youngest World Champion ever, or we'll see a completely unexpected victory by the underdog, as surprising as Botvinnik's win in his rematch with Tal in 1961.

THE CHESS KING FROM CHINA **WHO DEFIES THE ODDS**

Photo: Stev Bonhage

THE WORLD CHAMPION, DING LIREN, IS A SYMBOL OF PERSEVERANCE IN CHESS. RISING FROM HUMBLE BEGINNINGS IN THE CHESS-LOVING CITY OF WENZHOU, HIS PATH TO THE WORLD THRONE IS MARKED BY NUMEROUS ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND FIRSTS BUT ALSO BY CHALLENGES.

Born on October 24, 1992, in China, Ding was introduced to chess by his mother at the age of four. Fortune, or destiny, had it that he was taught early on by Chen Lixing, who also coached former Women's World Champion Zhu Chen. This led to Ding's first of many notable successes on the global chess scene—tying for first place in both the Under-10 and Under-12 World Youth Championships (2003, 2004), though finishing second on tiebreaks in both events.

In 2009, at just 16 years old, Ding became the youngest-ever champion of China, announcing to the world what was to come. Thanks to his stellar performance at the national championship, he earned the Grandmaster title later that year. Ding would go on to claim the title of Chinese champion two more times, in 2011 and 2012.

After conquering China, the next stage was the world. In 2014, Ding's performance earned China a gold medal at the Olympiad, and again in 2015 at the World Team Championships. That same year, he became the second Chinese player to enter the top 10, after Wang Yue.

Ding's consistent and solid play led him to the finals of the 2017 and 2019 Chess World Cups, though he fell short in both events. Despite these narrow-misses, Ding's reputation as a world-class player continued to grow.

Another milestone came in 2018 when Ding became the first Chinese player to break the 2800 Elo rating, reaching a peak rating of 2816—the joint tenth highest in chess history. His firm and consistent performance earned him recognition as one of the most difficult players to beat in a game. And he proved it: from August 2017 to November 2018, Ding maintained an unbeaten streak in classical chess across 100 games, a feat broken only by Magnus Carlsen in 2019.

The year 2018 marked Ding's peak, but also the beginning of his challenges. In his first shot at the world crown—the 2018 Candidates Tournament in Berlin—he drew 13 games and won just one out of 14. He silenced any doubts with his victory at the 2019 Sinquefield Cup, winning with 6.5/11 and a performance rating of 2845.

In 2020 came his second attempt at the Candidates Tournament in Yekaterinburg, Russia. The event started just as the Covid-19 pandemic brought the world to a sudden lockdown. Despite being a favourite, Ding secured only 2.5 points after seven rounds. The tournament was then postponed due to Russia's Covid restrictions. When it resumed in April 2021, Ding was in much better form—securing key victories in the final three rounds to finish with 7/14 and clinch fifth place.

His real shot at the title came in Madrid in 2022, at his third Candidates Tournament. This marked the beginning of a series of fortunate turns for Ding, defying the odds. He qualified for Madrid based on his rating, but only after playing a series of hastily organised tournaments in China and benefitting from Sergey Karjakin's disqualification. Ding's performance in the first half of the event was underwhelming—starting with a loss, followed by seven draws. However, he changed gears in the second half, scoring key victories over top players like Fabiano Caruana and Hikaru Nakamura, securing second place behind Ian Nepomniachtchi. Under normal circumstances, this would not have been enough for the World Championship match. However, with Magnus Carlsen confirming

that he would not defend his title, the match was organised between Nepomniachtchi and Ding.

The World Championship match took place in Astana, Kazakhstan. Ding's performance was shaky at the start, but so was Nepomniachtchi's as the match progressed. At the end of the classical part of the match, the score was 7-7, leading to a rapid tiebreak. In the rapid match where advantages were traded up and down, Ding triumphed 2½-1½, becoming the first Chinese player to hold the Classical World Chess Champion title.

However, his monumental achievement in 2023 soon became overshadowed by struggles. After winning the World Championship, Ding's performance dipped as he citied personal difficulties and struggles with depression. This led to a nine-month break from chess in 2024, skipping major events to prioritize mental health. Ding returned to the chessboard later that year at the TATA Steel tournament and the Olympiad, showing that he is still in the game and remains a force to be reckoned with.

In an interview ahead of the Match, Ding gave this assessment: "My current state is neither exceptionally good nor bad as I felt in the one and a half years. I have definitely moved past that sort of deepest or worst moments in the last one and a half years. I know that I have been playing great chess. I just couldn't win some of the positions. I still believe I can turn that around, maybe during the match."

Ding's mental strength and resilience on the board have been defining traits. But, as he faces an opponent whose recent performance and composure have been significantly more consistent - will he manage to overcome? Whether Ding continues his reign as World Champion or not, one thing is certain: his place among the greatest names of modern chess is unquestionable.

Photo: Stev Bonhage

"A MATCH IS A MATCH"

In the run-up to the FIDE World Chess Championship at the end of November where he will play against 18-year-old Dommaraju Gukesh, the reigning world champion from China, Ding Liren, gave an interview where he spoke about the challenges he faces, both on and off the board

He was open about the shortfalls in his recent performance: "I know my performances haven't been up to my usual high standards," Ding admitted, citing his underwhelming result at the recent Olympiad in Budapest, where he scored just 3.5 points from eight games, including one loss and no victories.

"But at the end of the day, a match is a match. It's between two players. When one player starts to hit his stride, how the opponent reacts depends on their experience and how they handle the situation at the moment," Ding said, emphasizing that match play and tournament play "are two different things."

When asked about his preparation for Singapore, Ding said his focus is more on the middlegame, an area where his challenger excels. "I'm more cautious towards the middle stage of the game because Gukesh is strong in strategy, the middle game, and positional understanding," Ding explained.

While noting that he and Gukesh are not close and therefore he doesn't know much about him, Ding said he expects to "get to know him better as the match goes on". Still, he gave credit to the maturity the 18-year-old Indian is showing on the board. "He's good at strategic understanding… he plays like a seasoned player despite his young age."

Ding was also asked to share thoughts on the rise of the younger generation in chess. "They play without any restriction or dogma that the previous generation had," he said, noting they constantly play for initiative and are more creative in opening preparation.

Photo: Stev Bonhage

On a personal level, Ding said his life has remained largely unchanged since becoming World Champion in 2023, though he admitted to a dip in his professional form. "My career might have taken a downward turn, but I believe there will be a turning point soon," he added.

In the second part of 2023 Ding took a break from chess, in part to address mental health challenges. Despite the poor showing in Budapest, he said he believes the participation in the Olympiad helped him regain focus ahead of the championship. "My current state is neither exceptionally good nor bad, but I've definitely moved past the worst moments of the last one and a half years. I know I've been playing great chess—I just couldn't convert some positions. I still believe I can turn that around, maybe during the match."

In another interview just weeks before the match, Ding candidly admitted feeling like "the clear underdog" and expressed fear that he might lose "very badly." Speaking with Kaja Snare on TakeTakeTake's YouTube channel, Ding opened up about his struggles and lack of motivation, saying, "Maybe I am not so eager to play. I don't have the same ambitions to win the game."

FROM A SCHOOL IN CHENNAI TO THE WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP MATCH IN SINGAPORE

Photo: FIDE / Michal Walusza

GUKESH DOMMARAJU, OFTEN REFERRED TO SIMPLY AS GUKESH D, IS THE YOUNGEST PERSON IN THE HISTORY OF CHESS TO BECOME THE CONTENDER FOR THE TITLE OF WORLD CHAMPION, ACHIEVING THIS AT JUST 17 YEARS OF AGE.

Born on May 29, 2006 in Chennai - the birthplace of several of India's top players, including the five-times world champion Viswanathan Anand - Gukesh learned chess in school, at the age of seven. This ignited a passion for the game that would see him rapidly advance his FIDE rating and title, achieving remarkable successes in tournaments over the course of just ten years.

Gukesh earned his FIDE Master title in 2015, after winning the Under-9 section of the Asian School Chess Championships. In March 2018 - just 11-year-old - he became an International Master. Gukesh clinched the Grandmaster at the 17th Delhi International Grandmaster Open, on January 15, 2019, at the age of 12 years, seven months and 17 days, becoming the second-youngest person in history to achieve this, after Sergey Karjakin. His coach at the time, Indian GM Vishnu Prasanna, noted that Gukesh's "strategic supremacy and unique understanding" as well as his work ethic helped set him apart from others. Over a 16-month period, Gukesh played no fewer than 276 games in 30 tournaments across 13 countries to achieve his GM norms, underscoring his determination.

His early successes include winning the Under-12 World Youth Chess Championships as well as taking five gold medals at the Asian Youth Chess Championships, winning competitions in different formats (classical, rapid, blitz and team). He gained global attention in 2022 when he won the individual gold at the FIDE Chess Olympiad, securing a phenomenal nine points out of 11 games and helping India secure bronze in the event. That same year Gukesh crossed the 2700 ELO mark, becoming the third-youngest chess player to do this (after Wei Yi and Alireza Firouzja), entering the realm of super-Grandmasters. In 2023 he went even further, breaking the 2750 ELO mark in August and then in September he reached the world number eight, overtaking Viswanathan Anand as India's top-rated player, a title which he held for more than 37 years. That same year, Gukesh finished second in the 2023 FIDE Circuit - a series of elite tournaments - which secured him a spot at the 2024 Candidates.

In April 2024, in Toronto, Gukesh again surprised the chess world: in his first-ever appearance at the Candidates tournament, he won the event with an outstanding score of 9/14 (having just one inferior position out of 14 games), becoming the youngest-ever challenger for the title of World Champion. Gukesh's final grand appearance this year, before the Match, was at the 45th Chess Olympiad in Budapest where he scored nine points out of ten games, leading his team to their first-ever team gold in the event.

Beyond chess, Gukesh spends a lot of time meditating. As a child who would get "very upset after a game" if he lost, Gukesh worked hard on finding his inner balance. In an interview with the British Chess Magazine in May, after his victory in

Delhi Open 2019
Photo: David Llada

Photo: Michal Walusza

GUKESH DOMMARAJU:

"I JUST WANT TO ENJOY THE EXPERIENCE"

Just 18, Gukesh Dommaraju is on the cusp of an extraordinary achievement – he is about to fight against Ding Liren, in the match which will determine the new world champion. The Indian prodigy's rapid ascend to the top has stunned many in the chess world. In a recent interview with the media, organized by FIDE, Gukesh shared his thoughts on the upcoming match, his preparation and what he thinks of his opponent.

"The year so far has been quite good," Gukesh said, reflecting on his recent successes. "A lot of interesting chess and some nice achievements. I'm really looking forward to the World Championship match in Singapore. It's coming soon, and I'm quite eager to start the match."

While many have labelled him as the favorite for the title, Gukesh is understandably more cautious.

"In general, I don't believe in predictions and who are the favourites. I just think that whoever shows up every day as the best will win the game eventually," he explained.

"I'm just focusing on the process, and I try to be at my best every day and play a good game. I just want to enjoy the experience."

And when it comes to that process, he outlined key elements of it: "The process

Toronto, he noted how important mediating is for his mental stability: "I started taking mental health seriously. Started doing yoga and meditating. Once I started doing that, I made sure it was done regularly, and it made a difference."

As the match in Singapore approaches, the question on the table is: can Gukesh defeat the World Champion Ding Liren?

Despite recent successes, Gukesh doesn't have a favorable score against the World Champion Ding Liren. Out of five classical games, Ding has won two (both as Black, in 2023 and 2024), while the other three ended in draws, including a draw at the 2024 Sinquefield Cup. Gukesh's sole victory came in a Fischer Random game in 2024, but that format differs from classical chess he will be playing in Singapore.

In a press conference ahead of the match in Singapore, Gukesh shared his thoughts on his opponent: "Ding is quite universal. Almost all the players at the top level have to be universal at this point. So, there are minute differences between all the players, and I'm trying my best to analyze them and use them to my advantage." As for predictions, the young Grandmaster remained pragmatic: "I don't believe in predictions and who are the favorites. I just think that whoever is able to show up every day as the best will win the game eventually."

is pretty much typical for the World Championships. I have a team, and we are preparing hard. I'm trying to be at my best and enjoy each moment of this journey."

When asked about Ding Liren and whether he had any specific strategies in mind for the match, Gukesh was diplomatic yet insightful. "It'll be an interesting match for sure. We are both strong players, and there'll be a lot of exciting games. I hope it's a beautiful experience for all chess lovers," he said. "As for my team, I can say Gajewski will be my trainer for the match, but beyond that, I can't reveal much."

A key theme throughout the interview was the question about how well can the 18-year-old handle the pressure of playing such a demanding and high-profile event, particularly on the international stage where he represents India. "It's always a privilege to play for India at such a high level, and I enjoy the experience. I think how I handle pressure is mostly through experience. I've played in many high-pressure situations, though not the World Championship, of course," he noted. "But I'm looking forward to the new experience."

It's a rare feat to become a role-model at 18, but Gukesh seems to have achieved that as well as many players are inspired by his meteoric rise. But his message to anyone wanting to follow in his footsteps is simple: "Just enjoy the game; chess is a beautiful game. It has many benefits. If you enjoy it, it's a very good hobby to have. And if you're talented, it's very nice to be a professional chess player."

Gukesh, like many of his contemporaries, belongs to the "computer generation" - kids who grew up with engines significantly stronger than humans, and who learnt with those engines and not via books. In the interview, he was asked about the influence computers have on chess preparation.

One of the interesting points raised during the interview was about the influence of computers on chess preparation, something Magnus Carlsen has openly expressed frustration with in his decision not to defend the crown. But Gukesh's outlook is different: "It's different for Magnus and me. Magnus has been doing this for so many years, and I'm just coming up, so it's a new experience for me. I basically enjoy the process," he said. "It's hard work, but I'm enjoying it, and let's see how things unfold."

Another topic was his age and the advantages and disadvantages that come with it.

"Because of my age, compared to the more experienced players, I have more energy levels, and it's easier to stay focused during long tournaments," he said, before acknowledging, "The disadvantage is obviously that I'm not as experienced and haven't played as much as them. But, so far, it's been positive."

For the first time in the history of the game, both players come from Asia - signifying a symbolic return of chess to its roots.

"It's nice that this will be the first time there is no European in a World Championship match. I hope it becomes even more popular in Asia," Gukesh remarked. "We're already seeing some very nice growth. China has been a superpower for a few years, and Uzbekistan is catching up. But in India, chess is already quite popular, and I hope it grows even bigger."

The venue for this momentous match holds a special place in Gukesh's heart as well—Singapore. "I've been there a couple of times. Once on vacation before I started playing chess, and the other time was one of my first international wins—some Asian under-nine tournament, I think. I have some pleasant memories from that championship in Singapore," he shared with a smile. "Singapore is a beautiful country, and I'm super glad to have the match there."

Interview: Steve Doyle, Chair of the U.S. Chess Trust

LESSONS FROM HALF A CENTURY IN THE GAME

By Milan Dinic; Photo: Photo: U.S. Chess Trust

A grandee of U.S. chess – Steve Doyle - reflects on his five-decade journey from the Fischer-Spassky boom to the modern digital era, sharing insights on the past, present, and future of the game.

In the summer of 1972, chess experienced an unprecedented surge in global attention as Bobby Fischer and Boris Spassky clashed in the historic World Championship match in Reykjavik. The match became a cultural phenomenon, drawing in millions, including Steve Doyle, who was captivated by Shelby Lyman's innovative PBS broadcast that brought chess into American living rooms.

Starting as an enthusiast, Doyle's chess journey soon evolved into one of the most influential careers in U.S. chess, lasting over 50 years. From organising the U.S. Amateur Team East Championship in New Jersey to serving as president of the New Jersey State Chess Federation to becoming the youngest president of the U.S. Chess Federation in 1984, holding the post until 1987. His international roles included serving as Vice President of FIDE from 1996 to 2006. For over 30 years, he wrote a chess column for the *Newark Star Ledger*, New Jersey's largest newspaper. Notably, all of this was in addition to a career as a high-powered executive at Fortune 100 companies such as Prudential and Aetna, where he held positions from CFO to division president. Since 2019, Doyle has led the U.S. Chess Trust, bringing in major sponsors to advance chess across the nation.

I met Doyle in New York this past summer for an interview for FIDE and BCM. With the World Rapid and Blitz Championships set to take place in the U.S. this Christmas - a historic first - I was eager to get a seasoned U.S. perspective on chess's current landscape and future. With over half a century of involvement, Doyle, a straight-talking corporate big-shot who no longer needs to prove anything to anyone, had much to share.

THE FISHER BOOM

Reflecting on the changes in chess since 1972, Doyle called the transformation "remarkable," emphasising the U.S.'s early adoption of online platforms. "I remember participating in online chess as early as the 1980s, which was pioneering back then. By the late '80s, we had a real presence online," he recalled.

In 1978, Doyle introduced "Electric Byte," a Florida-made computer, in a chess tournament, registering it as a youth competitor. "It was the first time a computer had played in a tournament," Doyle said, mentioning how Bill Lombardy and Arthur Bisguier were intrigued by this novelty. The computer later achieved significant commercial success, selling millions of units.

> **IN THE SUMMER OF '72, CHESS WAS THE NATIONAL OBSESSION, BUT BY FALL, PEOPLE HAD MOVED ON.**

The Fischer boom brought millions to chess in the early 1970s, but enthusiasm waned as fast as it had built up. “In the summer of ’72, chess was the national obsession,” Doyle said, “but by fall, people had moved on.” While Shelby Lyman’s broadcast made him a household name, it couldn’t maintain the momentum alone. The challenge was transforming passing interest into lasting participation: “New players would join clubs, play a few times, and then lose interest. The more dedicated stayed, but most drifted away. Now that generation is in their 60s and 70s.”

THE POST-COVID CHESS SURGE

Fast-forward to recent years, Doyle pointed to the surge of interest during the COVID-19 pandemic, coinciding with The Queen’s Gambit on Netflix. “COVID gave people time to reconnect with board games, and with platforms readily available, people could start playing immediately. This time, we had the infrastructure to support that surge,” he said.

Still, in the 1970s, the seeds of chess spread in the U.S. In many parts of the country, such as New Jersey or in urban centres such as New York, Chicago or LA, schools introduced active chess programs, notes Doyle. The 1980s saw former players transform into entrepreneurs, particularly in the burgeoning field of scholastic chess education. "We tried to increase revenue to sponsor more activities," Doyle explains. "We sold books, chess

COVID GAVE PEOPLE TIME TO RECONNECT WITH BOARD GAMES, AND WITH PLATFORMS READILY AVAILABLE, PEOPLE COULD START PLAYING IMMEDIATELY. THIS TIME, WE HAD THE INFRASTRUCTURE TO SUPPORT THAT SURGE.

sets, and eventually computers, which became big sellers."

The effects are evident today, with the U.S. boasting top global players like Fabiano Caruana and Hikaru Nakamura, and four more in the top 20 - a stark contrast to Fischer’s era of singular dominance.

The St Louis Chess Club and the huge investment put in by its founder Rex Sinquefield, helped immensely in elevating the status of the game in the States, and the U.S. standing in the chess world. Today, St Louis is the biggest chess centre in the world west of Moscow. But, what about the broader perspectives for U.S. chess?

Looking ahead, Doyle sees the future of chess in the U.S. as promising, though challenges remain for the game itself. “The Kasparov-Deep Blue match in the ’90s created a temporary lull, as people thought computers had ‘solved’ chess. But the internet revitalised interest, and now people can play anytime, anywhere,” he explained.

The relationship between chess and the corporate world has also been a defining theme in Doyle's career. "Chess taught me to think several moves ahead," he said. "Blitz taught me to make quick, sound decisions, essential in the boardroom." This mindset served him well during his time as mayor of Island Heights, New Jersey, particularly through the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic.

SEARCHING FOR THE "MEDIA HOOK"

On the topic of expanding chess's media presence, Doyle emphasised that significant events are key. "The Fischer-Spassky match did it in 1972, 'The Queen's Gambit' did it recently, and 'Searching for Bobby Fischer' brought new audiences in the 1990s," he noted. But to bring major events like the World Rapid and Blitz to the U.S., sponsorship is vital. "We need a unique hook to engage big corporations," Doyle said, citing a past U.S.-USSR match he pitched during the Cold War era, which successfully captured sponsors' interest due to its geopolitical intrigue.

Doyle also acknowledged the surge of chess in India, where players enjoy celebrity status akin to movie stars. "India's growth, sparked by Viswanathan Anand, has only been amplified by young talents like Praggnanandhaa and Gukesh. Their success, combined with strong institutional support, mirrors Fischer's impact but with sustainable momentum," he said.

The game that enthralled Doyle in 1972 has transformed in many ways, yet its core allure endures. With the World Rapid and Blitz coming to the U.S. this Christmas, many in the chess world are hoping to see a spike in interest in the game in the U.S. and, potentially, get more people like Doyle involved in the sport and help it move forward.

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TOURNAMENT REPORT:

NORTHUMBRIA FESTIVAL

By IM Shaun Taulbut

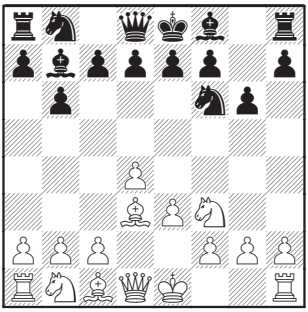
This successful chess festival was held in Darlington and featured a number of tournaments, the Masters Open had a number of grandmasters and ended in a tie between Frode Urkedal, Jung Seo and Oleg Korneev.

We look at some of the games, starting with a win by Jung Min Seo in the Masters Open.

Mark Hebden Jung Min Seo

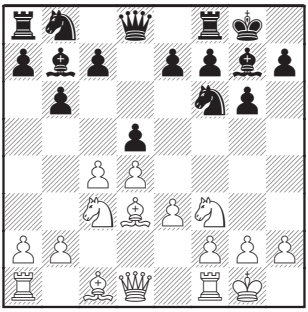
Northumbria Masters Open Darlington ENG (5.2)

1.d4 ♘f6 2.♘f3 b6 3.e3 ♗b7 4.♗d3 g6



Black opts for a double fianchetto against the modest opening by White, waiting for White to move in the centre.

5.0-0 ♗g7 6.c4 0-0 7.♘c3 d5



Black moves in the centre offering an exchange on d5 adopting a Grunfeld approach rather than a Kings Indian structure with ...d6 and ...e5.

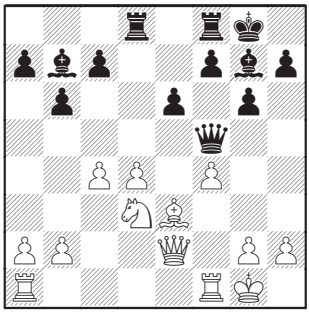
8.♕e2 e6 Black now can play for …c5 so White pushes forward with e4 which is a slight mistake

9.e4 dxe4 10.♘xe4 ♘c6 .

The attack against d4 presents White with an awkward choice as the pawn must be defended.

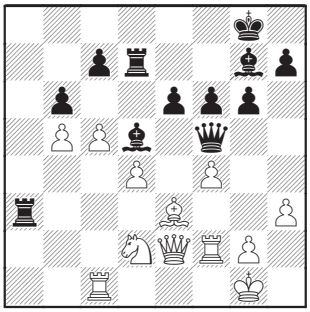
11.♗e3 ♘b4 12.♘xf6+ ♕xf6 13.♘e5 If 13.♗b1 c5 is awkward for White undermining the knight on e5.

13...♖ad8 14.f4 ♘xd3 15.♘xd3 ♕f5



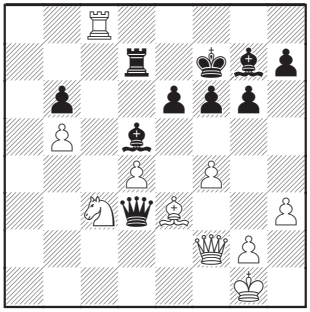
Black has the edge with his two bishops and control over the light squares and pressure against d4

16.♘e5 ♖d6 17.b4 ♕e4 18.♖f2 ♖fd8 19.b5 a6 20.a4 f6 21.♘f3 ♖6d7 22.♖c1 ♕f5 23.h3 axb5 24.axb5 ♖a8 25.♘d2 ♖a3 26.c5 ♗d5.



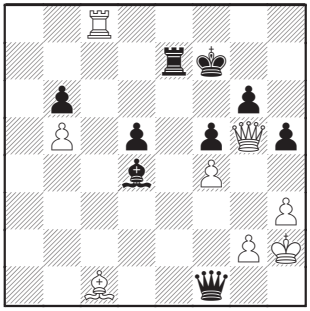
Black's grip on the position has increased and the White pawns are now liable to attack; Black can place his King on f7.

27.♘b1 ♖a2 28.♕e1 ♖xf2 29.♕xf2 ♕d3 30.cxb6 cxb6 31.♖c8+ ♔f7 32.♘c3



32...f5 32...♗b7 is very strong here when White has to give up the exchange with 33 ♖c6.

33.♘xd5 exd5 34.♔h2 ♖e7 35.♗c1 ♗xd4 36.♕h4 h5 37.♕g5 ♕f1



Black has invaded the White kingside and there is no defence against the mating threats

38.h4 ♕g1+ 39.♔h3 ♗f2 Perhaps easier is 39...♕h1+ 40.♔g3 ♕e1+ 41.♔h3 ♗f2 as now White sacrifices for a series of checks.

40.♖f8+ ♔xf8 41.♕f6+ ♔e8 42.♕xg6+ ♔d8 43.♕d6+ ♔c8 44.♕c6+ ♔b8 45.♕d6+ ♖c7 46.♕d8+ ♔b7 47.♕xd5+ ♔a7

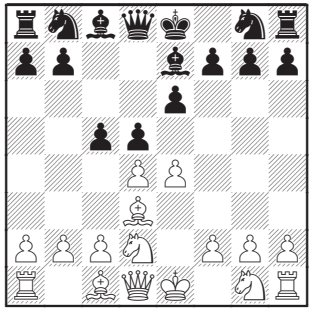
0-1

Now a game from Matthew Wadsworth who was the top English player in the Masters.

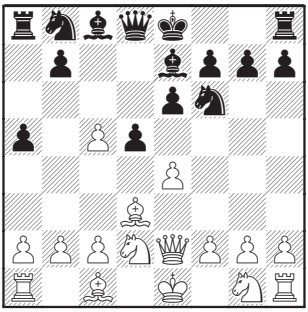
Iwan Cave - Matthew J Wadsworth

Northumbria Masters Open
Darlington ENG (3.5)

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘d2 ♗e7 4.♗d3 c5



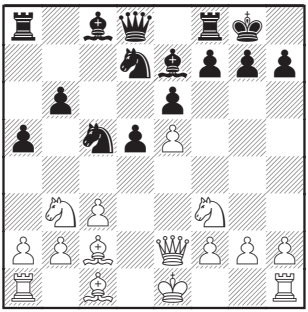
5.dxc5 ♘f6 6.♕e2 a5



Preventing White protecting the pawn on c5 with b4 and also preparing for the queenknight to go to a6

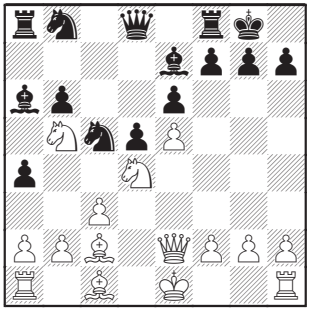
7.♘gf3 0-0 8.c3 ♘a6 9.e5 Playable is 9.♗xa6 ♖xa6 10.e5 ♘d7 11.b4 f6 with complex play.

9...♘d7 10.♘b3 ♘axc5 11.♗c2 b6

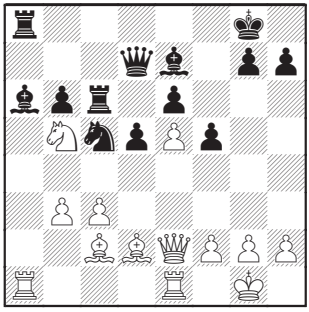


Black has the edge with the threat of …♗a6.

12.♘bd4 ♗a6 13.♘b5 a4 14.♘fd4 ♘b8 Guarding c6.



15.0-0 ♕d7 16.♖e1 f5 17.♗d2 ♖c8 18.b4 axb3 19.axb3 ♘c6 20.♘xc6 ♖xc6



21.♗d3 21.♕e3 is essential for unpinning the knight.

21...♖cc8 The pin is awkward so White plays an exchanging combination.

22.♖xa6 ♖xa6 23.♘d6 ♖a2 24.♘xc8 ♕xc8 25.♖b1 Allowed a winning pin but Black was already in control.

25..♗g5 26.♗xg5 ♖xe2 27.♗xe2 ♘e4 28.♗e3 ♘xc3 29.♖e1 d4 30.♗f4 ♘xe2+ 31.♖xe2 ♕c3

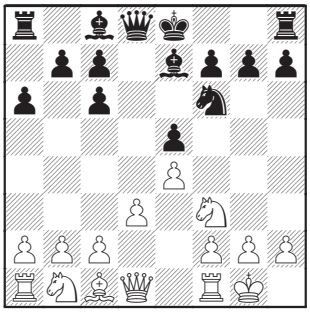
0-1

Jonah Willow won this positional game against Alex Golding in the GM section

Jonah B**Willow** - Alex **Golding**

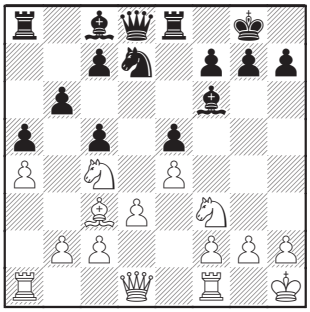
Northumbria Masters GM
Darlington ENG (4.4)

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 a6 4.♗a4 ♘f6 5.0-0 ♗e7 6.♗xc6 dxc6 7.d3



The doubly delayed Exchange is interesting as Black has to regroup to defend e5.

7...♘d7 8.♗e3 0-0 9.♘bd2 ♖e8 10.a4 a5 11.♔h1 c5 12.♘c4 ♗f6 13.♗d2 b6 14.♗c3



White has an edge with play against e5

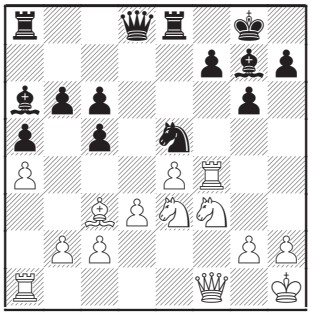
14...g6 15.♘fd2 Preparing f4; a good plan to play on the dark squares.

15...♗a6 16.♘e3 White retains his knight as the Black Bishop is limited on a6.

16...♗g7 17.f4 exf4 18.♖xf4 ♘e5

If 18...♗xc3 19.bxc3 leaves Black weak on the kingside dark squares.

19.♕f1 c6 20.♘f3



If 20.♗xe5 ♗xe5 21.♖xf7 ♗xb2 22.♖b1 ♗g7 is only slightly better for White

20...♖a7 20...f6 is best as now Black loses control of the dark squares.

21.♘xe5 ♗xe5 22.♘g4 ♗xc3 If 22...♗xf4 23.♘f6+ is winning.

23.bxc3 ♔g7 24.♕f2 White prepares to treble his pieces on the f-file.

24...f5 If 24...♕g5 25.♖f1 ♖ee7 26.h4 ♕h5 27.♘f6 ♕e5 28.h5 ♕xc3 29.hxg6 fxg6 30.♘h5+ ♔h6 31.♖h4 with a mating attack; or 24...♗c8 25.♘f6 ♖e6 26.♖f1 h6 27.♖f3 White has a clear advantage.

25.exf5 gxf5 26.♘e3 26.♖xf5 ♗c8 27.♖f4 is also good.

26...♔h8 27.♘xf5 ♕f6 28.♖f1 ♖f8 On 28...♕xc3 29.♘d6 is winning.

29.♕e1 ♖aa8 30.♘e7 Winning as after rook exchanges on f8 White has ♕e5+ followed by ♕b8+

1-0

NORTHUMBRIA MASTERS OPEN DARLINGTON ENG
LEADING FINAL ROUND 9 STANDINGS:

Rk	SNo	Name	Ti	FED	Rtg	TB1
1	2	**Urkedal, Frode Olav Olsen**		NOR	2564	6.5
	3	**Seo, Jung Min**		SWE	2478	6.5
	4	**Korneev, Oleg**		ESP	2469	6.5
4	5	**Wadsworth, Matthew J**		ENG	2464	6
	16	**Dasgupta, Avyukt**		ENG	2159	6
	20	**Yoon, Jacob D**		ENG	2118	6
7	7	**Dgebuadze, Alexandre**		BEL	2430	5.5
	8	**Lutsko, Artem**		UKR	2414	5.5
	9	**Hebden, Mark L**		ENG	2385	5.5
	10	**Derakhshani, Borna**		ENG	2348	5.5
	12	**Boswell, Jacob Connor**		ENG	2241	5.5
	17	**Vijayakumar, Rishi**		SCO	2157	5.5
	18	**Webb, Richard M**		ENG	2148	5.5
	29	**Wilks, Simon**		ENG	2015	5.5
	40	**O'Donnell, Matthew**		SCO	1966	5.5
16	1	**Shkuro, Iuri**		UKR	2566	5
	6	**Turner, Matthew J**		SCO	2441	5
	11	**Kalavannan, Koby**		ENG	2248	5
	12	**Shafi, Declan**		SCO	2222	5
	15	**Brewer, Callum D**		ENG	2182	5
	24	**Cave, Iwan**		WLS	2047	5
	25	**Rathbone-Jones, Ifan**		WLS	2021	5
	28	**Malinovskii, Ilia**		ENG	2016	5
	34	**Blades, Kit**		ENG	1996	5
	38	**Mclean, Robert**		ENG	1972	5
	41	**Shaw, Dashiell L**		ENG	1960	5

There was an all play all with the possibility of GM norms and an all play all with the possibility of international master norms the results of which were as follows

NORTHUMBRIA MASTERS GM DARLINGTON ENG
CATEGORY: 6. AVE: (2400)

Rk	Name	FED	ELO	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Pts	TPR
1	GM **Gasanov, Eldar**	UKR	2469		1	=	1	=	=	=	1	=	1	6.5	2558
2	FM **Svanda, Ondrej**	CZE	2384	0		1	=	1	=	=	=	1	=	5.5	2482
3	IM **Willow, Jonah B**	ENG	2414	=	0		1	1	=	1	0	=	1	5.5	2478
4	IM **Murphy, Conor E**	IRL	2460	0	=	0		0	1	1	1	1	1	5.5	2473
5	GM **Gormally, Daniel W**	ENG	2425	=	0	0	1		0	=	=	1	1	4.5	2397
6	FM **Lohia, Sohum**	ENG	2408	=	=	=	0	1		=	=	0	=	4	2356
7	FM **Golding, Alex**	ENG	2383	=	=	0	0	=	=		1	=	=	4	2359
8	IM **Papadiamandis, Elliot**	FRA	2324	0	=	1	0	=	=	0		=	1	4	2365
9	IM **Wachinger, Nikolas**	GER	2454	=	0	=	0	0	1	=	=		1	4	2351
10	GM **Arakhamia-Grant, Ketevan**	SCO	2277	0	=	0	0	0	=	=	0	0		1.5	2140

NORTHUMBRIA MASTERS IM DARLINGTON ENG
LEADING FINAL ROUND 9 STANDINGS:

Rk	SNo	Name	Ti	FED	Rtg	TB1
1	10	**Moreby, James**	FM	ENG	2236	7
2	4	**Wall, Gavin**	IM	IRL	2258	5.5
	8	**Large, Peter G**	IM	ENG	2336	5.5
4	6	**Dunnington, Angus J**	IM	SCO	2256	5
	7	**Urh, Zala**	WIM	SLO	2256	5
6	2	**Hollan, Petr**	FM	CZE	2249	4.5
7	1	**Burnett, Andrew**	FM	SCO	2193	3.5
	3	**Shearsby, Jude**		ENG	2164	3.5
9	9	**Abhyuday, Santhosh**		IND	2203	3
10	5	**Collin, Moritz Valentin**	FM	SUI	2234	2.5

TONY BUZAN – CHESS LOVER

By Grandmaster Raymond Keene OBE

A celebration of the life and achievements of Tony Buzan and a tribute to his passing five years ago was held at the House of Lords on Monday, 7 October, presided over by Tony's close friend and supporter, Prince Philipp of Liechtenstein.

Tony Buzan, who died of a heart attack five years ago at John Radcliffe Hospital, Oxford, was originally motivated by the question of "who is intelligent?" During his time at junior school, the young Tony was struck by the anomaly that one boy, who had a tremendous knowledge of nature, repeatedly failed school tests on his favourite topic due to an inability to express himself.

Unsurprisingly, the nature expert was consigned to the bottom of the class, despite Tony's certainty that this boy's knowledge was far superior to his own. Authorities had decided who was intelligent and who was not. Tony found this grotesquely unfair, and it eventually led him to develop three beliefs.

The first was that an operations manual was needed for the human brain—not for its medical functions but rather for how it works. The second was that every human has a spark of genius within, but the challenge is to ignite it. Tony's third insight was his invention of the Mind Map, a tool for recording thoughts, plans, and creativity, bypassing conventional academic norms. The Mind Map was predicated on radiant thinking, spreading out from a central concept, utilising colour, dimension, and association, and it also served as a powerful memory aid.

Tony went on to write over 140 books, translated into 40 languages. He lectured around the world and made numerous TV programmes about his ideas. He was an enthusiastic player of mental games, such as chess and Go, and a near Olympic-standard

Tony Buzan

rower on his favourite stretch of the Thames at Marlow, where he often sculled with Olympic multiple gold medallist Sir Steve Redgrave. Tony also sponsored the annual Oxford vs. Cambridge Varsity Chess Match, the world's oldest running chess fixture, for several years.

The Mind Map's value as a memory aid led Tony to establish the World Memory Championship in London in 1991. This first edition was won by the dyslexic Dominic O'Brien, who later won seven additional titles. From eight entrants in 1991 to over 300 in 2018, the championship has grown dramatically. That year, it was won by a 14-year-old Chinese girl, Wei Qinrun. Both victors exemplify Tony's belief that everyone possesses an immortal spark of genius, awaiting only the right inspiration.

Having known Tony for 30 years and written his biography, I was struck by his

inner child. His own school experiences had left an indelible mark, and he often positioned himself as the headmaster of humanity. One of his numerous unfinished books at his death was an ambitious "report card" on humanity, marking humanity out of 100 on topics such as the environment, education, peace, economics, and race and gender relations. Another explored animal intelligence, a topic that fascinated him. He was particularly interested in how insects with micro-brains achieve such feats of organisation, like ants and termites, or arachnids like the Portia spider.

Tony was particularly at ease with children. One of his triumphs was the TV series *In Search of Genius*, where he took a class of unruly comprehensive school children and, over six episodes, transformed them into model pupils.

In contrast, at the elite end of the spectrum, Tony once received a mysterious invitation to a desert hideout in Bahrain from a major rock star (who must remain anonymous). Tony was offered £100,000 to teach mental literacy, mind mapping, memory, and speed reading to the star's offspring. While Tony lectured on mental improvement, the rock star retreated to imbibe a potent, drug-infused concoction he called "Mother's Milk."

Despite his extensive catalogue of manuals on brain function, what Tony craved most was recognition as a poet. His favourites included his friend and Poet Laureate Ted Hughes, Gerard Manley Hopkins, and Shakespeare's *Richard II*, especially Gaunt's speech to his son Bolingbroke on banishment.

Tony's enduring legacy will be the readers of his books and the attendees at his lectures who discovered new depths within themselves and found inspiration to awaken what Tony called the "sleeping giant"—the human brain.

Here is an example of my chess-themed Mind Map on the Ruy Lopez opening, from Tony's *Mind Map* book, published by the BBC.

Mind Map by Raymond Keene OBE in preparation for a lecture given on Spanish television

A black-tie dinner celebrating Tony's legacy took place at the House of Lords on 7 October, with Prince Philipp of Liechtenstein, one of Tony's major supporters, as guest of honour.

One of Tony's supporters and most brilliant disciples was the American thinker and motivational speaker Michael Gelb. On one memorable occasion, with Poet Laureate Ted Hughes as our audience, I took on Tony and Michael in a simultaneous chess and Go match. I managed to win at Go, mainly conducted by Tony, while drawing in chess, led by Gelb. Here is our chess game; sadly, my Go victory has been lost to posterity:

Tony Buzan and Michael Gelb vs. Raymond Keene

Consultation match, Hanbury Manor, 1995

1.e4 c6 2.♘f3 d5 3.exd5 This exchange is less testing than 3.♘c3, a theoretical main line.

3… xd5 4.d4 ♘c6 5.♘c3 ♗g4 6.♗e2 e6 7.h3 ♗h5 8.O–O ♗b4 White's opening has been unpretentious, but not necessarily bad. However, firm action is needed to avoid doubled pawns on the c-file, granting Black a permanent strategic advantage. White's knight foray is thus timely.

9.♘e5 ♘xe5 10.dxe5 ♗xe2 If 10… ♗xc3, 11. b5+ ♔f8 12. ♕xh5 resolves White's issues.

11.♘xe2 ♘e7 12. c3 ♗c5 13. ♗g5

Tempting here is 13…♕c7 to win White's pawn on e5, as 14.f4 is countered by the bishop on c5. However, after 13…♕c7 14.♗xe7, Black's 14… ♔xe7 is required to maintain threats. Then, 15. ♕b3 ♖ab8 16.♘d4 ♕xe5 17.♖fe1 gives White ample compensation for the lost pawn.

13… h6 14.♗h4 ♕c7 15.♗xe7 ♕xe7 If 15… ♔xe7, then 16. ♕b3.

16.♕a4+ White pursues exchanges, aiming for an even endgame.

16…♕d7 17.♕xd7+ ♔xd7 18.♖ad1 ♔e7 To avoid issues with c4.

19.♔h1 ♖ac8 20.♘b1 ♗b6 21.♘d3 ♖c4 The half-open c-file offers Black some initiative.

22.f4 g6 23.g3 ♖hc8 24.♔g2 a5 25.♔f3 ♗a7 Black prepares a queenside assault via …b5 and …b4.

26.♖d2 b5 27.a3 ♗b6 28. fd1 ♖d8 With …b4 delayed, Black aims for a central breakthrough.

29.g4? Necessary was 29.♘f2.

29… d4 30.cxd4 ♘xd4 31.b4 a4 Fixing a weak a3 pawn. With the d-file pin, I felt a Black win was close.

32.h4 ♖c4 Planning to strengthen the pin laterally with …♖c3.

33.♘b2 A bold choice, breaking the pin but allowing Black's rook to target the weak a3 pawn.

33…♖xd2 34.♖xd2

This error turns a likely win into a sure draw. Correct was 34…♖c3+, meeting 35.♘d3 with …♖xa3.

35.♘d1 ♖a1 36.♖d3 ♖a2 White is low on moves but still has one option.

37.♘c3! ♖xa3

Black must play 37…♕a3.

38.♘d5+ exd5 39.♖xa3 ♗d4 White's combination has won the exchange, rook for bishop, but Black's control of a1 guarantees he will recover White's rook. Yet, White's resources are not fully exhausted.

40.♖d3 ♗b2 41.♖xd5 a3 42.♖xb5 a2 43.♖a5 a1=♕ 44.♖xa1 ♗xa1 45.b5 ♗d4 Despite being a piece for two pawns ahead, Black cannot prevent pawn elimination. Black's h-pawn promotes on a square unprotected by his bishop, making a win impossible even if the lone White king reaches h1.

46.♔e4 ♗b6 47.f5 gxf5+ 48.♔xf5 ♗f2 49.h5 ♗e3 50.♔e4 ♗b6 51.♔f5 ♔f8 52.e6 fxe6+ 53.♔xe6 ♔g7

A draw offered and accepted ½-½

The draw is forced by 54.♔f5 ♗e3 55.b6 ♗xb6 56. g5.

England's chess wonder: Nine-year-old Ethan Pang achieves historic milestone

Nine-year-old Ethan Pang from England has just hit a stunning milestone in chess. The youngster topped 2300 rating points, making him the youngest FIDE Master ever.

Looking at November's rating list, you'll spot Pang at 2303 - he's now leading both U9 and U10 groups worldwide. At Westminster Under School, this bright chess talent reached this mark at just nine years and seven months old, beating the previous record set by IM Faustino Oro.

Oro and Pang have been in a race for records throughout this year but Pang's been on fire. Back in July, he broke another record, crossing 2200 to grab his CM title. Then at Budapest's Vezerkepzo tournaments, he shocked everyone by beating three strong GMs - Slovakia's Milan Pacher and Hungarian duo Attilla Czebe and Zoltan Varga.

October brought more success, as Pang pushed past 2300 in just four months - lightning quick by chess standards. While Oro hit the rating earlier, FIDE's official nod makes Pang's achievement special.

Speaking for the English Chess Federation website, Raymond Pang, Ethan's father, said: "As his parents, we couldn't be prouder of his recent accomplishments through his hard work and determination. He adopts a 'never give up' attitude that was instilled by one of his earlier chess coaches.

"Chess is a sport that instils perseverance and resilience, and it's inspiring to see him begin to realize how this journey will help him navigate both physical and mental challenges, not just for chess, but hopefully in all aspects of life.

"We hope he continues to grow through these experiences, understanding that each challenge is an opportunity to learn and evolve."

Photo: fide.com

Three-year-old from Kolkata becomes the youngest FIDE-rated player

Chess has a new record holder, and he's barely old enough for nursery school. Three-year-old Anish Sarkar from Kolkata has become the youngest player ever to earn a FIDE rating, notching up 1555 points at just three years, eight months and 19 days old.

The tiny talent, born on January 26, 2021, didn't waste time getting stuck into serious competition. He cut his teeth at the West Bengal State Under-9 and Under-13 Opens this October, taking on rated players like Arav Chatterjee and Ahilaan Baishya. He even got a taste of top-level chess, facing India's number one Grandmaster Arjun Erigaisi in a simul match.

What makes this feat even more remarkable is that Anish has smashed the previous record, set by another Indian youngster Tejas Tiwari, who was five when he got his first rating in 2023. Under the watchful eye of his coach, Grandmaster Dibyendu Barua, young Anish shows incredible stamina for his age, often training for seven or eight hours at a stretch.

Anish's achievement comes at a time when chess prodigies seem to be getting younger and younger. While most toddlers are learning their ABCs, this little lad from Kolkata is already making his mark in the international chess scene, suggesting we might be witnessing the start of something truly special.

By Pete Tamburro; ptamburro@aol.com

The most frustrating annotated game ever!

Many years ago (and this will date me), I used to read for instruction the annotated games by the prolific Fred Reinfeld, who showed up in seemingly countless books and magazine articles. Along with I.A. Horowitz and Ruben Fine, he was one of the triumvirate of chess teachers that most young people studying chess would turn to for direction. By the time I got to him, I had been through Morphy and Marshall game collections by sheer luck and had developed a real feel (I thought) for open lines, development and attacking exposed kings in the opening. Then, along came this Tartakower game.

Reinfeld was beside himself with praise for the genius of Tartakower for his creative and unorthodox defence against a genius of attack - Rudolf Spielmann. I played it over and over, read the notes and became frustrated because something wasn't right. What Black played was a violation of everything I had learned to the point about openings. I gave up trying to figure it out and every now and then would look at it and just shake my head.

Recently, I bought some volumes of *The Chess Correspondent* from the 1940s and 1950s. There to greet me in the July/August 1944 issue was Reinfeld's column, "What to Do After the Opening" along with that old nemesis of a game. OK, no more Mr. Nice Guy. I'm not going to be bullied by Reinfeld and his notes. I have a friend that'll take care of him: Stocky A. Fish, XVI! He comes from a good family, known for taking care of outrageous notes. What did I learn? My lesson was that I forgot the very principles of approaching move choice that I should have remembered. And for Spielmann to not apply those principles was astonishing, but also a reminder that it afflicts us all at the worst possible times.

Rudolf Spielmann – Savielly Tartakower

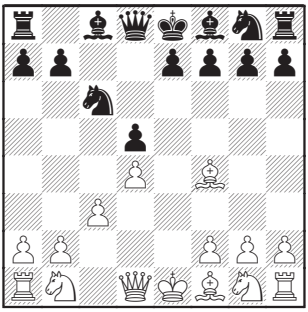
Copenhagen, 1923

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.exd5 I recall being influenced by Fischer's win over Petrosian in the USSR v. World match, so Reinfeld's notes, even though decades before that, were worth studying.

3...cxd5 4.c3 Although 4.♗d3 and; 4.c4 are more popular, there is a reason for the c3

move. Lots of people don't like the Panov-Botvinnik Attack because of the isolated pawn that can result and the c3 move first is one that, if you are not playing the PBA, you know you will make while you may not be sure where the bishop is going. It most likely will transpose, but not in this game.

4...♘c6 5.♗f4



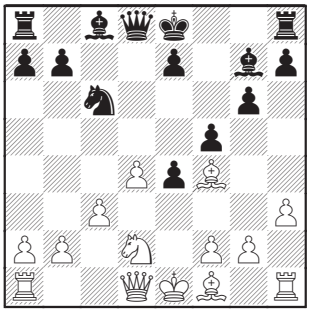
Very interesting. Spielmann is not following the usual recipe of developing the kingside. This bishop attacks e5 and c7, where a Caro Kann queen likes to hang out. My best guess is that he also has a suspicion that Tartakower will fianchetto and Spielmann is thinking of castling queenside and going for an eventual Bh6 with h4 idea of some kind. It seems rather cumbersome to arrange in an efficient manner, but, hey, it's Spielmann.

5...♘f6 6.♘d2 g6 7.♘gf3 ♗g7 8.h3!? What do you think? Is it part of the future assault plan with g4 or is it just to prevent Bg4?

There doesn't appear to be any reason to prevent the pin: 8.♗d3 ♗g4 9.h3 ♗xf3 10.♘xf3 and White is well-placed.

8...♘e4?! My first thought back then was, "Shouldn't you castle rather than move the same piece twice in the opening?" Not only that, but the pawn seemed rather vulnerable on e4 because Black obviously couldn't play f5 to support it.

9.♘xe4 dxe4 10.♘d2 f5



Reinfeld put his first diagram after White's next move. That was his mistake. Mine was starting my "deep look" into the game with his diagram rather than this one. The obvious, even glaring, characteristic of this position is the light squared diagonal from b3 to g8. This king isn't castling anytime soon. Reinfeld explained that part really well after White's next move. In summary: an e6 move "would be able to castle, but at what a price" and "Black's QB will have no scope and will be tied to the defence of the KP."

11.♗c4? What Spielmann, Tartakower, Reinfeld and my lowly self didn't consider was the most precise move. White had TWO choices to stop castling. ♗c4 seemed so natural and routine, but natural and routine don't always win games. The real puzzle for me was why was this so much better and what could I have done in my thinking process to come up with the right move? Was there some opening principle involved? Well, the opening principle is solid--keep the king from castling and open lines. How about the decision making process? I harkened back to "Think Like a Grandmaster" by Kotov and his decision tree.

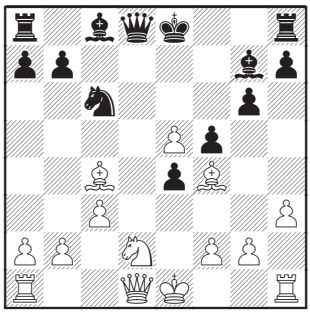
You were taught to go down a branch, make an evaluation and then go down the other candidate move branches and make conclusions about them. White only had two candidate moves to consider: Bc4 and ♕b3. Nobody did that and that omission

cost Spielmann his game, Reinfeld his annotations, me my years of frustration in trying to understand the game and Tartakower putting the whole game in his book of games. He just started with the coming e5 move rather than put the game in. I would bet serious money that he found ♕b3 after the game. As you will see, he did miss one other thing towards the end that he didn't mention in his book. Of course, the trick in all this is also anticipating the e5 move. That, too, was doable. Figuring out the positional weakness of e6 is one thing. Going through the tactical sequence of an e5 move is imperative and recognizing that it has to be dealt with as your opponent's candidate move goes beyond "look for all checks and captures" to "look for all possible desperate freeing moves!" 11.♕b3!! e5 12.dxe5 ♘xe5 *(12...♗xe5 13.♗xe5 ♘xe5 14.0-0-0 ♕c7 15.♗b5+ ♔f8 (15...♗d7 16.♕e6++-) 16.f3! and we have the makings of a rout.)* 13.♗xe5 ♗xe5 14.♕b5+.

11...e5!! Tartakower finds the right move! How many amateur Caro players would find it? The knight move gives White two good choices: 11...♘a5 12.♗b5+ *(12.♕a4+ ♗d7 13.♗b5 ♘c6 14.♕b3 ♘a5 15.♕d5)* 12...♗d7 13.♕a4 ♘c6 14.♕b3 In the interest of balance, how does Black find e5?;

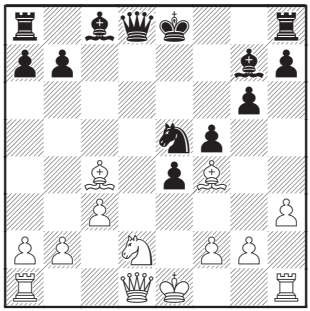
Black might try to avoid the checks that come with e5 by playing the bishop out: 11...♗d7 12.0-0 e5 *(Black now has to do this as f3 is threatened - something Reinfeld did comment on.)* 13.♗e3 exd4 14.cxd4 ♘a5 15.♗f4 ♘xc4 16.♘xc4 0-0 17.♘d6 with equal chances. Nicely posted knight vs. two bishops, and the passed d-pawn can be strong or weak, depending on the players. However, what would make Black choose e5? It's the same decision tree idea. You look at candidate moves. Your concrete calculations will give you two primary conclusions about ♗d7 or e5. An amateur would probably go with ♗d7 and rightly so! It is clearer and the position is equal. The road the GM took required far more calculation and more branches sprouting off the main e5 branch. Think about your mind going through the following moves in your head at move eleven!

12.dxe5



And now we have two legendary GMs not doing the decision tree method. Once you look at this opening as it evolves, you realize that concrete calculation plays a decisive role in the openings just as much as in the middle game and endgame. Sure, it's easy to criticize with Stocky helping out, but the one thing computers do really well is calculate. They teach us how to think. Look at the variations as they appear on the engine, one after the other. Each line has an evaluation. We humans have a tendency to "pre-filter" our move choices and thus not consider lines that might be critical to our understanding of the position.

12...♘xe5?



Better was 12...♗xe5 13.♗e3 ♗d7 14.♕e2 ♕c7=.

13.♗xe5? Reinfeld was rather caustic here: "This is necessary to continue the 'attack' " Oops!

This could have been a miniature: 13.♕b3! ♕e7 *(13...♘xc4 14.♘xc4 ♗e6 (14...0-0 15.♘b6+) 15.♕b5+ ♕d7 16.♘d6+ ♔f8 17.♕xd7 ♗xd7 18.♘xb7±)* 14.0-0-0 ♗d7 (14...♗f6 15.g4 ♘xc4 16.♕xc4 ♕e6 17.gxf5 ♕xc4 18.♘xc4 ♗xf5 19.♘d6+ ♔e7 20.♘xb7+-) 15.♘xe4!! fxe4 16.♗xe5 ♗xe5 17.♖xd7+-.

13...♗xe5 14.♕b3 ♕b6 Better was 14...♕e7 because then Black could hand-castle with ♔f8 and ♔g7.

15.♗b5+! 15.♕xb6 axb6=.

15...♔e7 15...♔f8 Same reason as above.

16.♘c4 ♕c5 17.♘xe5 ♕xe5 18.0-0-0!? White could have tried to keep pressure on the b7 pawn and prevent ♗e6 to that end with 18.♗c4 ♖d8 19.♗g8 ♗e6 20.♕xb7+ ♔f6 21.♗xe6 ♕xe6 22.0-0! *(22.♕xh7? e3!=)* 22...♕c8 23.♕xc8 ♖axc8 24.♖fd1 and although it's a tough endgame, I'd rather be a pawn up than a pawn down.

18...♗e6 19.♗c4 ♗xc4 20.♕xc4 ♖hd8 With the minor pieces gone, White's attack has dissipated into a likely drawn major piece ending; however, Spielmann has one last trick up his sleeve. He makes moves that force the king and then queen to make the only right move each time.

21.♕b4+ 21.f3 b5 22.♕b4+ ♔f6 23.fxe4? a5∓.

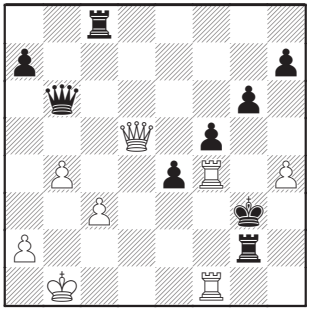
21...♔f6□ 22.♕xb7 ♕f4+□ 23.♔b1 ♕xf2□ 24.♕c6+ An honourable ending to this battle would have been: 24.♕xh7! e3 25.g3 ♖xd1+ 26.♖xd1 ♕xg3 27.♖d7 ♕g1+ and the checks go on.

When I first saw this, it seemed to be one of those chase the king up the board and mate him games. Black does escape, but the game shows us that you must exercise extreme caution!

24...♔g5 25.h4+ ♔g4 26.♖df1 ♕b6 27.♕c4 Mate in two threat. He doesn't give up.

27...♖d2 He could pack it in now, though. However, we learn another lesson here at the end.

28.b4 ♕e3 29.♖h3 ♕b6 30.♖hf3 ♖xg2 31.♖f4+ ♔g3 32.♕d5 ♖c8??



An incredible blunder that both players miss. Time difficulties for both? These moves all win: 32...♖e8; 32...♕e3; 32...♖d8.

33.♕d7?? Rule Number One in my Openings for Amateurs books: Every move, before you move, look at all checks, captures and forced moves. 33.♖xe4! fxe4 *(33...♖xc3 34.♕e5+ f4 35.♕xf4+ ♔h3 36.♖h1+ ♖h2 37.♖xh2#)* 34.♕e5+ ♔g4 35.♕xe4+ ♔h5 36.♕d5+ ♔h6 37.♕xg2+-.

0-1

33...♕a6 What are we to make of all this? That chess engines ruin defencive masterpieces? That the GMs of long ago made mistakes? That's all very silly. What we should take away is how we discipline our thoughts in an opening that is no longer in the opening book in your brain. Please remember the decision tree thinking process. I played my first rated

A SPECIAL THANK YOU AND FAREWELL

It's been over ten years writing this column. My undying gratitude and thanks to James Pratt, who took a chance on having an amateur write for amateurs and to Josip Asik who followed as editor and continued me as a columnist, which led to our founding American Chess Magazine in 2016, and, of course to Milan Dinic, whose intelligence and devotion to this august publication is deeply appreciated by those who work most closely with him. I just met him at an airport in New Jersey for a brief lunch. We will be friends for a long time, I hope.

And a special shout out to my biggest fan, Elliot Ainley, who kept up feedback and correspondence for these years. Much appreciated.

My third Openings for Amateurs book is coming out this autumn with some special additions that go a long way to demonstrating why I have written for amateurs to give them tools, not just for openings, but for thinking and planning. I always told my history classes when they asked about how long their papers should be that when you were done saying what you had to say, STOP! I will now follow my own advice.

I have every British Chess Magazine in bound volumes back to the 1890s and in a CD before that. I have read them all and even indexed them.

This magazine is a national treasure. It was such an honour for me to be in the same pages as the heroes of British chess that taught me so much on these pages. That Shaun Taulbut and Stephen Lowe have personally kept it afloat is the greatest service to a chess publication ever in the history of chess. I hope legions of British chess players will recognise this and enter the subscription lists to be a part of the noblest publishing venture in our royal game's existence.

OTB game in 13 years this past February in the World Amateur Team Championship held in my home state of New Jersey. I played one game - with the black pieces. I beat a young adolescent who is already over 1800. I stuck like glue to the decision tree formula and it worked - most of the time.

At age 77, I found that I would go down one branch, make my conclusion and then hit the other candidate move(s) and make conclusions. Unfortunately, by the time I finished, I couldn't remember what the heck the first branch moves were! Do give it a try, though. The ♗c4/♕b3 decision still bugs me to this day, as you can tell. Even if you ignore the decision tree thinking process, you should think about the old chess coach rule of making moves you're sure you have to make and waiting on the ones you're not sure of. You know you want to get on the diagonal that prevents castling, so you know it has to be the Q or B. Her majesty doesn't have a better square, but the cleric could be useful in going to b5 as well, especially if you consider the e5 sequence by Black. Why put it on c4 if you may need it on b5 later? Put the queen on b3 and use the bishop for a b5 check in one move instead of two. Think calmly and wring out the truth of a position.

Lewis Chessmen

show their hidden beauty in fresh Edinburgh display

Ten of the famous Lewis Chessmen are showing off their backs for the first time at Edinburgh's National Museum of Scotland. The fresh display at the Kingdom of the Scots gallery entrance lets visitors peek at previously hidden details of these 12th-century masterpieces, with new lighting bringing out intricate carvings that have been concealed for ages. Dr Alice Blackwell, who looks after medieval bits and bobs at the museum, points out that these weren't just game pieces - they were proper works of art meant to be admired from every angle, from their detailed thrones to their fancy hairdos.

These chessmen, crafted from walrus ivory and whale teeth around 1200 in Norway, are part of a bigger story. When they were found in the early 1800s on the Isle of Lewis, there were 93 pieces in total - enough for four chess sets. While Edinburgh gets to show off eleven of them, most of their mates - 82 pieces to be exact - live down in London's British Museum, though six have popped back home to Museum nan Eilean in Lewis. This new way of showing them helps us understand just how skilled those medieval craftsmen were at their job.

CELEBRATING THE 100TH ANNIVERSARY OF FIDE AND OF SURREALISM (PART TWO)

In celebration of FIDE's 100th anniversary and the centenary of Surrealism, BCM presents a special series of articles written by Celia Rabinovitch, from her book Duchamp's Pipe: A Chess Romance – Marcel Duchamp & George Koltanowski. This series will explore the profound intersections between chess and surrealist art, drawing us into the captivating worlds of artists and chess players who bridged boundaries between creativity, imagination, and the chess board.

From the surrealists in Paris who embraced chess as a challenge to the bourgeois norm, to the chess adventures of Duchamp and Koltanowski in New York and beyond, each chapter delves into the rich stories and cultural context that connect these two realms. Through this series, we invite readers to discover how chess became an inspiration, a rebellion, and a creative canvas for some of the 20th century's most iconic artists and thinkers.

Chapter 6

Transatlantic Chess from Paris to New York

The beauty of a move lies not in its appearance but in the thought behind it.
ARON NIMZOWITSCH

THE WAR THAT IN 1915 had driven Duchamp from Paris to New York, where he was fast becoming a leader of the avant-garde movement, in 1918 pushed him to an even more remote destination—all to escape the threat of US conscription. Marcel left for Buenos Aires, Argentina, on August 14, 1918, a few months before WWI ended that November. Fifty years later, Duchamp confided the following to French journalist Pierre Cabanne: "Since 1917 America had been in the war, and I had left France basically for the lack of [my] militarism. For a lack of patriotism, if you wish. [And] I had fallen into American patriotism which certainly was worse."

In Buenos Aires, Duchamp pursued a solitary life-writing letters, working on chess problems, and playing correspondence chess with Walter Arensberg. "I play chess alone for the time being," he wrote to the Arensbergs in January 1919. "I came across some magazines and cut out 40 [Jose Raul] Capablanca games that I am going to play over. I will probably also join the chess club here to try my hand again. I've had a set of rubber stamps made (which I designed) that I mark games with. I'm sending a copy to Walter with this letter." Duchamp spent ten months in Buenos Aires, "studying chess and fashioning his own chess sets. [He] designed a chessboard for correspondence chess, the wooden *Buenos Aires Chess Set*," and a traveling table, *Traveling Board* (1919). In *The Imagery of Chess Revisited*, curator and author Larry List notes how the simple forms of the *Buenos Aires Chess Set* (1918), made of traditional wood, recall Brâncusi's reductive abstraction. *Traveling Board*, which employed folding metal legs supported by castors,was both elegant and practical.It was likely one of the first truly portable gaming tables made with simple, modernist design principles. In addition, Duchamp's chess inventions prefigure contemporary portable games - as explored later in chapters 17 and 18. In his last letter to the Arensbergs from Buenos Aires, Duchamp writes: "I am all set to become a chess maniac. I find all around me transformed into a knight or queen, and the outside world holds no other interest than its transposition in winning or losing scenarios."

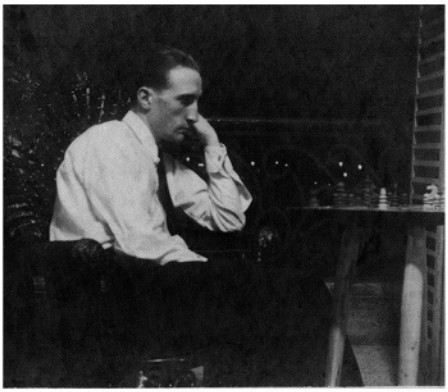


Figure 19. Marcel Duchamp seated on a balcony looking at a chessboard, Buenos Aires, January 1919

Ever the inveterate traveler, the sad young man on a train, Duchamp craved cerebral amusement. Chess offered an excellent means of achieving this engagement, in part because it was a consuming pastime for transitions and travel. Duchamp resumed his travels when he returned to France to renew his visa in July 1919; five months later he again left for New York, staying until 1923. He became known for rejecting what he termed "retinal art," which relies on optical vision and aesthetic pleasure. He disdained the repetitive aspect of painting as a commodity of supply and demand. By this time he considered painting to be a bourgeois indulgence—one that, like conventional marriage, led to ennui.

But even within that cool self-possession, Duchamp had a powerful effect on others, one of fascination and impenetrability. As he told Pierre Cabanne, "There was Alfred Stieglitz, the photographer, whose main characteristic was being a philosopher, a sort of Socrates. He always spoke in a very moralizing way, and his decisions were important. He didn't amuse me much, and at the beginning I must say he didn't think much of me either; I struck him as a charlatan.… Later he changed his mind about me, and we became good friends." In 1923, Stieglitz photographed Duchamp in the profile mug shot (see figure 20) and described him in a letter to gallery director Julien Levy: "He is ever the master of masters. Whatever he does fills me with great delight." Note that at first Duchamp did not reciprocate that esteem—a pattern he also maintained with women who adored him.

As his chess obsession grew Duchamp frequented the Marshall Chess Club on Eighth Street in Greenwich Village, located above the Pepper Pot restaurant—where the games often continued, and where Duchamp was to be found every night. His ambivalence with women continued even while playing chess. Man Ray, his close friend and creative collaborator since 1915, describes how a young woman named Hazel "played the piano in the Pepper Pot, a Greenwich Village restaurant much frequented by artists, and when Duchamp was there she 'could not take her eyes off ' him; but he passed his time playing chess." Man Ray recounts, "She asked whether I knew Duchamp well; he was such a strange man, had responded to her advances at first, was very affectionate, but had long periods of indifference." This was circa 1920, when Duchamp invented a female alter-ego, Rrose Sélavy—a pun on the French saying "*Eros*, *c'est la vie*" (as we will discuss later). Rrose's common-sounding name has been analyzed by many interpreters of Duchamp. Perhaps it was impelled by Duchamp's simultaneous disdain for and attraction to the female artifice commercialized by fashion and perfume companies. Much has been written of how Duchamp's erotic and sometimes crude irony punctured his art. (And we will again write of his *Belle Haleine* perfume bottle.)

By contrast, chess provided a refreshing curative to the conflation of eros, gender, and social rules or boundaries. Despite the complexity of chess, there was a set of possible rules to be exploited in its

strategy, and Duchamp was an expert. He confirmed to writer Calvin Tomkins that he loved the clarity and logic of chess: "It's complete. There are no bizarre conclusions like in art, where you have all kinds of reasonings and conclusions. It's absolutely clear-cut. It's a marvellous piece of Cartesianism. And so imaginative that it doesn't even look Cartesian at first. The beautiful combinations that people invent in chess are only Cartesian after they are explained. And yet when it's explained there is no mystery. It's a pure logical conclusion, and it cannot be refuted."

He began to enter competitions, and aspired to play the club's founder, US chess champion Frank Marshall. In a 1920 letter to his sister Suzanne and her husband, the painter Jean Crotti (1878-1958), Duchamp shared his obsession with the game, which had led to his latest chess design ideas: "This winter I will be on Marshall's chess team (his 8 best players) against the other N.Y. teams. Just as I had already done last winter—but this time I'm hoping to win a few games (which I didn't then)—I am *crazy about it*—." He then described his plans to "launch on the market a new form of chess sets." Though his kings and pawns would be the standard white and black,the other pieces would instead be lighter and darker shades of additional colors. The bishops would be yellow: light yellow for the "white" pieces and dark yellow for the "black"; the knights would be light and dark red; the rooks, light and dark blue. And the queen: light green and dark green, plus,"*Please notice* that the Queen in her color is a combination of the Bishop and of the Rook (just as she is in her movements)—. 3rd I am going to ask Marshall if I can use his name and call them Marshall's Chessmen. I will give him 10% of the receipts [takings]. 4th They will be made out of cast plaster mixed with glue, which will make them as sturdy as wooden pieces."

Figure 20. Marcel Duchamp, 1923, by Alfred Stieglitz

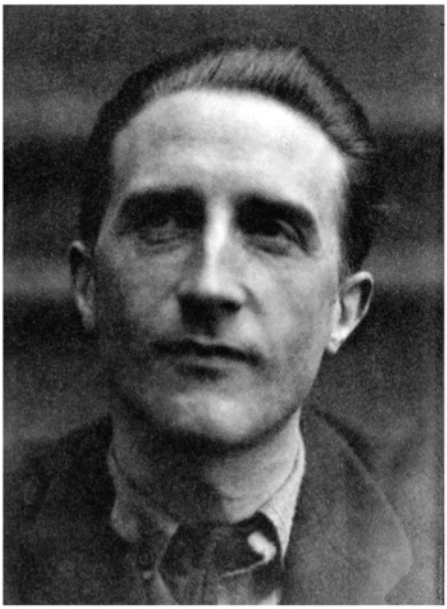


Figure 21. Marcel Duchamp, 1922-1923

The results of Duchamp's plan to capture Frank Marshall's interest in this venture are unclear. Francis M. Naumann remarks that there may have been a plaster-cast replica of the wooden *Buenos Aires Chess Set* painted with the colors Duchamp specified in the letter. He speculates that Henri-Pierre Roché had a replica made in 1920, when Duchamp returned briefly to Paris.

Marshall and Duchamp shared serendipitous parallels in their lives. Both had a gracious demeanor combined with cutting intellect. Born ten years apart, they each learned to play chess at an early age—Frank at ten and Marcel at eleven. From the age of eight to nineteen Marshall lived in French-speaking Montréal, Canada, where he became a champion of the Montréal Chess Club. In 1896 he returned to New York, and competed successfully in national and international tournaments. In 1915—the same year Duchamp came to New York—he started Marshall's Chess Divan. In his memoirs, Marshall wrote of his club's purpose: "The object was to establish in New York a central meeting place for lovers of chess, much on the same lines as such famous resorts as Simpson's Divan in London and the Café de la Regence in Paris. It was my idea to make the Divan a place of instruction where young players would be encouraged and where all chess players could feel free to gather."

Duchamp may have played at Marshall's Chess Divan before he left for Argentina in 1918. He certainly did after he returned to New York in 1920, since he became a member of both Marshall's club and team. A photograph of Duchamp from the 1920s (see figure 21) still hangs in the Marshall Chess Club today.

Marcel maintained a transatlantic life for the next few years, swapping between New York and Paris and playing chess all the while. His chess pursuit was at the fore when, in February 1923, he headed to Brussels for four months to study with Edmond Lancel at Le Cygne chess club, based in the famous Hotel le Cygne with its namesake swan

Hotel Le Cygne, c. 1900

Swan over entrance of Hotel le Cygne

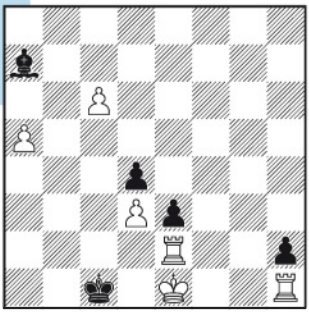
(*le cygne*) on the pediment. (In Belgium's tolerant environment, Karl Marx often stayed at the Hotel le Cygne; his portrait hangs in its interior today. It's highly likely that he wrote the Communist Manifesto there with German philosopher Friedrich Engels; it was published in Brussels in February 1848.) In May Duchamp spent some time in Ghent, where he played in the Belgian interclub games, then returned in October 1923 to play in Brussels—where he was matched against the young George Koltanowski.

PROBLEM WORLD

by Christopher Jones
cjajones1@yahoo.co.uk
Grandmaster of Chess Composition

Solutions are given on page 702

1

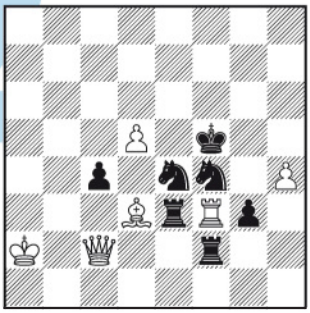


Paul Michelet (London)

Mate in 4

ORIGINAL

2

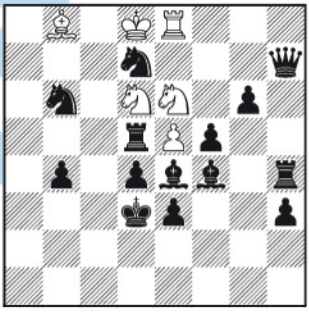


Nicolae Popa and Christopher Jones (Romania / Bristol)

Helpmate in 2 - 2 solutions

ORIGINAL

3

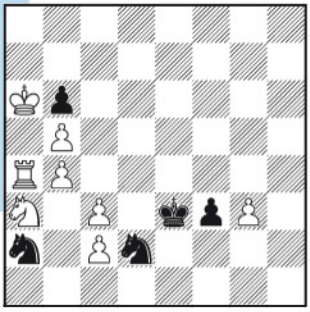


Abdelaziz Onkoud (France)

Helpmate in 3 (b)Pe3>c4

ORIGINAL

4



Andrew Kalotay (USA)

Helpmate in 3.5 (b)a2=bB

ORIGINAL

QUOTES AND QUERIES

FROM THE SCOTCH TO THE RUY LOPEZ: UNCONVENTIONAL USES OF ...G5 IN CHESS

By Alan Smith

The Scotch Game/Gambit is a bigger topic than I appreciated. Here is a stand-in.

6282 1.♘f3 in the openings has a considerable heritage going back to Ahlhausen, Frank and Fred Brown, Grob and Basman. In later years players have deferred the move, so we have 1.d4 ♘f6 2.g4, the Gibbins-Weidenhagen Attack, 1.c4 ♘f6 2.♘c3 e6 3.♘f3 ♗b4 4.g4, and even 1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘♘c3 ♘f6 4.♘f3 ♗e7 5.g4!?

1...g5 is another story. Michael Basman - well-known for his unorthodox opening practices - experimented with this in the 1980s. Your columnist was sceptical until I saw Basman's radical approach at the 1981 Benedictine tournament. There are others, such as the Göteborg variation of the Sicilian Najdorf, a line of the Benko Gambit, and yes, even the Ruy Lopez.

If one thinks of ...g5 in the Spanish, then Brentano's counter-gambit 3...g5 springs to mind, also Korchnoi - Portisch, Wijk aan Zee 1968: 1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 a6 4.♗a4 d6 5.0-0 ♗d7 6.♖e1 g5.

Here are some other examples of ...g5!?. Black goes off the iron rails of theory into the wild unknown and drags White along for the ride.

Karl **Kuhn** - Janos **Gajdos**

Budapest 1912

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 a6 4.♗a4 ♘f6 5.0–0 ♗e7 6.♖e1 b5 7.♗b3 d6 8.c3 ♘a5 9.♗c2 c5 10.d3 ♕c7 A flexible move; White doubtless expected Black to transpose into the main lines with ...0-0, but Gajdos had different ideas.

11.h3 ♘c6 12.♘bd2 g5!? 13.♘xg5 Hoffer preferred 13.♘f1 to meet 13...g4 14.hxg4 ♗xg4 with 15.♘e3.

13...♖g8 14.♘f1 h6 15.♘f3 ♗xh3 16.♔h2? A blunder; 16.♘f1 was correct.

16...♘g4+ 17.♔g1 17.♔xh3?? ♘xf2+.

17...♗xg2 18.♘g3 ♗h3 19.♘h2 ♘xh2 20.♔xh2 ♗g4 21.f3 ♗e6 Black has an edge.

22.♗e3 0–0–0 23.a4 ♗h4 24.♗f2 ♕e7 24...b4 slows White's attack for a while.

25.axb5 ♗xg3+ 26.♗xg3 ♕g5 27.♖g1 ♕h5+ 28.♔g2 ♖xg3+!? This looks tempting, but it is speculative.

29.♔xg3 ♖g8+ 30.♔f2 ♕h2+ 31.♔e3 ♘d4! 32.♖xg8+ ♔d7 33.♖c1?? White faltered here. I found some online analysis

that favoured 33.♖xa6, but Black should still be on top with accurate play.

33...♔e7 34.♖a7+ ♔f6 35.♗a4 d5! 36.exd5 ♘f5+ 37.♔e4 ♕f4# **33...f5! 34.♖g7+ ♔e8** 35.exf5 ♘xf5+ 36.♔e4 ♕f4#.

0-1

Amsterdammer, *2nd March 1913*

Gajdos (1879-1918) reached 2400 according to Edo ratings.

B. **Flynn** - Graham **Chesters**

Wales, 1963

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 a6 4.♗a4 ♘f6 5.d3 ♗c5 6.0–0 Rather than 6.♗xc6 dxc6 7.♘xe5? which is well met by 7...♕d4 8.♗e3 ♕xe5 9.d4 ♕xe4 10.dxc5 ♕xg2 11.♖f1 ♗h3

6...d6 7.♗g5?! A positional error. This should wait until Black has castled, which has been widely appreciated since Dubois - Steinitz, London 1862.

7...h6 8.♗h4? Far too casual; either 8.♗e3 or 8.♗xf6 was essential.

8...b5 9.♗b3 g5! 10.♗g3 h5 11.h3 White is in big trouble. The acquisitive 11.♘g5 h4 12.♘xf7 hxg3 13.♘xd8 runs into 13...♗g4 14.♕d2 ♘d4 15.♘c3 ♘f3+ 16.gxf3 ♗xf3 and mate follows —Graham Chesters.

11...h4 12.♗h2 g4 13.♘g5 gxh3 14.♘xh3 14.♘xf7 ♕e7 15.♘xh8 ♕g7.

14...♗g4 15.♕d2 ♗xh3 16.gxh3 ♕d7 17.♔h1 ♕xh3 18.f3? White is already lost. 18.♘c3 ♕f3+ 19.♔g1 ♖g8+ or 18.♕e2 ♘d4 19.♕e3 ♘f3.

18…♕xf1+ 19.♗g1 ♕xg1#

0–1

Crewe Chronicle, *16th November 1963*

Graham Chesters went on to win the Welsh championship in 1964. I first came across the next game in Edward Winter's *Chess Notes* 3754.

Peter **Lee** - David **Mabbs**

Oxford City - Cedars, 1964

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 a6 4.♗a4 ♘f6 5.0–0 ♗e7 6.♖e1 b5 7.♗b3 d6 8.c3 ♘a5 9.♗c2 c5 10.h3 Pachman preferred 10.d4 ♕c7 11.a4!

10...♕c7 11.d4 ♘c6 12.♘bd2 g5!? 13.a4 ♖b8 14.dxc5 dxc5 15.♘f1 There was a case for 15.♘xg5 ♖g8 16.h4 h6 17.♘gf3.

15...g4 16.hxg4 ♗xg4 17.♘e3 ♖g8 18.axb5 axb5 19.♕e2 19.♘d5! forces the exchange of a pair of pieces.

19...♕c8 20.♘d5 ♘h5 21.♕e3 ♗h3 22.♘xe7 White had to avoid 22.g3 ♘xg3! 23.fxg3 ♖xg3+ 24.♔h2 ♕g4 25.♖g1 ♗g2!.

22...♖xg2+ 23.♔f1 He had no choice; 23.♔h1 lost on the spot. 23...♕g4 24.♕g5 ♕xf3.

23...♕g4 24.♔e2 24.♘xc6? ♘f4!.

24...♘d4+! 25.cxd4 exd4 26.♕h6 There is no escape. 26.♕g5 ♘g3+! 27.♔d2 ♖xf2+ 28.♔d3 ♕xf3+ 29.♗e3 ♕xe4# or 29.♖e3 ♗f1#.

26...♖xf2+! 27.♔d3 ♕f3+ 28.♗e3 ♗f1+ 29.♖xf1 ♕e2#.

0–1

Middlesex Chessletter, *June 1964*

Peter Lee went on to win the British championship in 1965.

Endgame Studies

by Ian Watson
ian@irwatson.uk

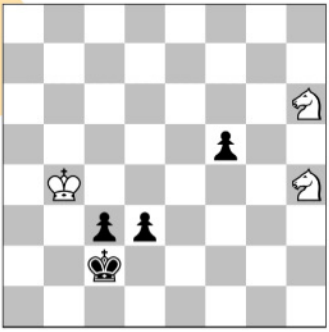
1

P. Byway
Original composition 2024
DRAW

2

J. Timman
The Problemist 2020
DRAW

3



D. Gurgenidze
FRME Ty 2022
DRAW

4

M. Pasman
Vecherny Peterburg 2021
DRAW

THE KNIGHT PAIR REVISITED

In July's issue, I extolled the pair of knights. The knight pair is usually viewed as greatly inferior to the bishop pair, but I hope I convinced you of its numerous advantages. Paul Byway has sent me a new study that shows yet another ability of the knight pair, one that is particularly unexpected—two knights corralling a bishop on an open board. One would expect the bishop to easily escape their net, but not here. The study has ♘♘ vs. ♗♖, which is generally a win for the bishop and rook, so White has to create threats to exchange a knight for the bishop.

The solution runs: 1.♘f4 ♗f1 2.♘ed3+ ♔c4 3.♘b2+ ♔b3 4.♘bd3 ♖a5 5.♘c1+ ♔b4 6.♘ce2 and White draws because he has constructed an unbreakable cage around the bishop. It's reasonably easy to understand that the final position must be a draw, but it's far from obvious why the thematic try 6.♘cd3+? fails. Black responds 6...♔b5, but that's just the start of a long set of manoeuvres that enable Black to break into White's cage via g3. The databases tell me that it takes 213 moves for Black to win! Instead, in the solution line, the Black king would have to break in via e4, but he can't do so without allowing his bishop to be exchanged.

The sidelines are: 1...♖xe5/f4 2.♘d3+; 2...♔b5 3.♔e1 or 2...♔d4 3.♘e2+ ♔c4 4.♘g3; 3...♔d4 4.♘e2+ ♔c5 5.♘d3+ ♔~ 6.♘g3; 5...♔c4 6.♔e1. Notice also that in the solution line after 4.♘bd3 White was threatening ♔e1—hence Black's reply, 4...♖a5.

I didn't offer this for solving because of the need for tablebases. Next, however, we have another ♘♘ vs. ♗♖ study in which you don't need them, so it's for you to solve. The composer is Jan Timman—yes, that Jan Timman, the one who fought so many fine OTB duels with Tony Miles.

The other two studies have the same material—♘♘ vs. ♙♙♙—as did Paul Michelet's study in the July issue, but they display dramatically different drawing devices; further evidence of the versatility of the knights. The first is by David Gurgenidze. He is one of the leading modern study composers and a grandmaster of chess composition, but he is not the same person as the late OTB grandmaster Gurgenidze. The final study, by Michael Pasman, divides into two main lines after White's first move.

The answers to the Timman, Gurgenidze, and Pasman studies are on page 703.

SOLUTIONS TO PROBLEMS

This month's originals

Do helpmates have a certain 'marmite' quality about them for chess players? Many players take to them, while others find the collaborative nature of the play utterly alien. Your attitude towards them will have a big influence on your estimation of this month's column! As you probably already know, we look for lines of play in which Black and White conspire to reach a position in which Black is mated. Thus, in the shortest of them, we're looking for two Black-White-Black-White (#) move sequences. Occasionally, we have sequences in which White starts, and so in the final one in this column, it's one White-Black-White-Black-White-Black-White (#) sequence when a2 is occupied by a black knight, and another White-Black-White-Black-White-Black-White (#) sequence when it's a black bishop at a2.

Before all that, an orthodox problem by Paul Michelet. White's position is overwhelming, but if 1.c8=♕, 1...♗d4! enables Black to survive beyond move 4.

...not 1.c8=♕—so...?

White prevents Black from playing ...♗d4 by means of 1.c5!. Now there are three fairly obvious lines of play: if 1...♗b6 2.cxb6; if 1...♗xc5 2.c8=♕, with ♕xc5 to follow; and if 1...♔b1, 2.c8=♕ is again effective. But the crux of the problem is the much nicer defence 1...♗b8(!), when 2.cxb8=♕ would be stalemate. So White must play 2.cxb8=♗!; the upshot of this is that Black is defenceless against 3.♗xh2 and 4.0-0#: castling, a rather unlikely-seeming outcome to the play.

A typical helpmate in two

Helpmates in two tend to be explorations of reciprocal line effects in two parallel solutions, with what rooks do in one solution on orthogonal lines being counterpointed by what bishops do on diagonal lines in the other solution, and vice versa. The captures on Black's first move in our second problem, which unpin the black knights and cause subsequent line clearances, are grist to the composers' mill. If Nicolae and I have a misgiving about our problem, it is that somewhere among the compendia of two-move helpmates, a researcher might find that it's all been done before. The hope, though, is that at least for all but the most knowledgeable researcher, it gives pleasure to alight upon the parallel lines:

1...♖xd3 remember, in helpmates it's Black moving first. **♕e2 2.♘d2 ♕e6#** and

1...♖exf3 ♕d2 2.♘e2 ♕g5#.

A typical helpmate in three

What I said above about orthogonal/diagonal correspondence in the two solutions of a helpmate in two applies also to many helpmates in three, including one by Abdelaziz. The extra moves of White and Black permit greater complexity. (From composers' point of view, that usually means greater difficulty in making them sound, but on the other hand, a greater chance that researchers won't find anything too closely comparable as an unwelcome forerunner.) In this case, an experienced solver will piece together the implications of the thematically suggestive configuration of the four white officers and the need to clear a path through the forest of black pieces north of the black king (probably sacrificially), but might still struggle to see the clever, and marvellously matched, move sequences in the two solutions. In the diagram position, it's:

(See page 697)

1.♗xe5 ♘xe4 2.♔xe4 ♗xe5 3.d3 ♘g5#. Then, when the pawn that is on e3 in the diagram is placed instead on c4, we have:

1.♖xe5 ♘xd4 2.♔xd4 ♖xe5 3.♗d3 ♘b5#.

Not quite such a typical helpmate

When helpmates extend beyond three moves, the number of less easily thematically classifiable examples increases, as exemplified by Andrew's problem. Here, the focus is on activating the white rook, which is hemmed in by its own pieces. We need to get the white knight out of the way. It seems as though this should be straightforward, but in each part of the solution, a unique two-move pathway must be followed. Perhaps the more piquant solution is the one in the diagram position. (Andrew himself says that this is "the interesting twin".) The solution runs as follows:

1...♘b1 2.♘c1 ♖a1 3.♘d3 ♘a3 4.♘f2 ♖e1#.

The white knight, having had to go to b1 (as moving to c4 gave an unwanted check), is again in the way and has no non-detrimental move other than back to a3. This infringes the orthodox stricture that in the mate position in helpmates, white officers should all be gainfully employed. But the quaint play of this knight is rich compensation for this disregard of orthodoxy. The second solution is more orthodox, in that the knight does end up guarding a flight square (one almost regrets this conventionality!). When it's a black bishop at a2, we have:

1...♘c4+ 2.♔e4 ♘xb6 3.♗e6 ♖a1 4.♗f5 ♖e1#. There's another breach of orthodoxy in the repetition of the moves of the white rook in the two solutions, which again you may find to be well-justifiable.

SOLUTIONS TO ENDGAMES

(See page 700)

Timman

1.♔e6 ♖g4 2.♘d2 ♖xg6+ 3.♔f5 ♗h5 4.♘b1+ ♔a4 5.♘c3+ ♔a5 6.♘b3+ ♔a6 7.♘c5+ ♔a7 8.♘b5+ ♔a8 9.♘c7+ ♔b8 10.♘d7+ ♔xc7 11.♘f6 ♖h6 12.♔g5 ♖g6+ 13.♔f5 ♖h6 14.♔g5 ♖g6+ 15.♔f5 with a positional draw.

1...♗h5 2.♔f5 ♖g4 3.♘e2 ♖xg6 4.♘f4.

In the main line, 2.♔f5? ♖g1 3.♘d4 ♗h5;

4...♔b2 5.♘d3+ ♔xb1 6.♘f4 ♖h6 7.♔g5.

Gurgenidze

1.♘4xf5 ♔b2 2.♘g4 c2 3.♘f2 d2 4.♘e3 c1♕ 5.♘fd1+ ♔a1 6.♘c3 ♕g1 7.♘ed1 draws. In Byway's study, White constructed a fortress to keep the Black king out; here White constructs one to keep the Black king in.

Pasman

1.♘f3 with two lines:

1...f1♘ 2.♘f4 h2 3.♔d4 ♘d2 4.♔e3 ♘xf3 5.♔xf3 g2 6.♘h3 g1♘+ 7.♔f2 ♘xh3+ 8. ♔f1 draws, and **1...♔g2 2.♘h4+ ♔g1 3.♘f3+ ♔f1 4.♔c4 ♔e2 5.♘d4+ ♔e1 6.♘f3+ ♔e2 7.♘d4+ ♔e3 8.♘xg3 ♔f4 9.♘f1** draws.

1.♘xg3+? ♔g2 2.♘df5 h2.

In the first solution line: **2.♘xg3+? ♘xg3 3.♘g5 ♘e4+ or 2.♔d4? g2** 4.♘xd2 g2; 5...♔g1 6.♘e2+; 6...g1♕ 7.♘f2+.

In the second solution line: **5...♔d1 6.♘xg3 h2 7.♘df5 f1♕+ 8.♘xf1 h1♕ 9.♘1g3 ♕f3 10.♔d4 ♕f4+ 11.♔d5 ♔e1 12.♔e6 ♔f2 13.♘h5 ♕g5 14.♘f6**, achieving a stable set-up and thus drawing.

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